THE Hudson REVIEW

JOYCE CAROL OATES:
The Widows—a story

WENDELL BERRY:
The Specialization of Poetry

JOHN SIMON:
Hippodrama at the Psychodrome

GILBERTO PEREZ:
All in the Foreground

HAYDEN CARRUTH:
The Cowshed Blues

Poems by ANTHONY HECHT, ELIZABETH KNIES, RICHARD PEVEAR, KIM WALLER.

Music Chronicle by ROBERT S. CLARK.

Reviews by J. E. CHAMBERLIN, MARVIN MUDRICK, WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD, WILLIAM H. YOUNGREN.

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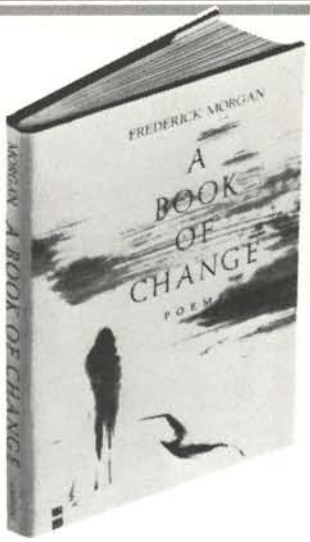

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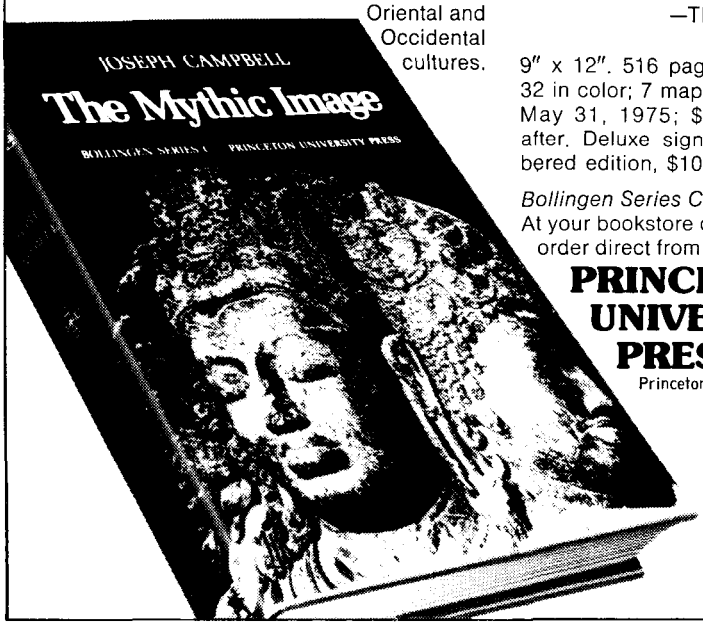

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Notes on Contributors

WENDELL BERRY's most recent collection of poetry was *Country of Marriage* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).

KIM WALLER* lives in New York City where she has taught English at The Brearley School and has written for *Mademoiselle* and other magazines. At present she is working on a book of poems and helping her husband develop a film series for children.

JOYCE CAROL OATES's second volume of criticism, *New Heaven, New Earth: The Visionary Experience in Literature* has just been published by Vanguard. The essay on Kafka included in this book originally appeared in the Winter 1973–74 issue of THE HUDSON REVIEW.

ANTHONY HECHT is currently at work on a translation of Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus.*

ELIZABETH KNIES* lives and works in York Harbor, Maine. These are her first poems to appear in a major literary journal.

RICHARD PEVEAR's translation of *The Gods* by Alain was recently published by New Directions.

GILBERTO PEREZ* describes himself as a "lapsed theoretical physicist who now writes about the movies." His articles have appeared in *Sight and Sound, Film Comment* and the *Revista de Occidente* (Madrid). For two years Mr. Perez held a Fellowship at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He currently teaches film history and criticism in the Visual Arts Program at Princeton University.

WILLIAM H. YOUNGREN is writing a book on eighteenth-century aesthetics.

A collection of MARVIN MUDRICK's essays and reviews entitled *The Man in the Machine* will be published by Horizon Press this Spring. Many of these essays originally appeared in this Review.

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WENDELL BERRY

The Specialization of Poetry

FOR SOME TIME I HAVE BEEN GATHERING and reading a number of examples of the newest of literary genres, the interview-with-a-poet. I have at hand interviews with Philip Levine, James Dickey, Galway Kinnell, William Matthews, Adrienne Rich, Anne Sexton, Louis Simpson, and Mark Strand. At first my interest rose mainly from curiosity as to the reasons for the growth of this genre: What does it mean that the work habits, personal circumstances, and casual opinions of poets have come lately to be held in such regard by the editors of magazines, by at least some readers, and evidently by the poets themselves? But various ones of the interviewed poets were expressing ideas that have been common in writings and discussions of poetry for a good many years, and as I read and made notes and re-read I realized how several of these ideas work together to define a specialization of poetry that parallels the specialization of other disciplines.[1]

My perception and understanding of this specialization of poetry is, of course, indebted to the work of many other writers. The subject has been dealt with most ably, among writings known to me, in John Crowe Ransom's essay, "Poets Without Laurels," and in Edwin Muir's lucid book, *The Estate of Poetry*. Mr. Ransom spoke of the purification or the puritanization of poetry, which he saw as a part of the general dissociation of "the elements of experience" and of the "faculties" of the modern mind; and Muir of the diminishment of poetry's "estate," which he defined as its "effective range and influence." The Ransom essay was published in *The World's Body* in 1938, when the catastrophe of dissociation was still in its adolescence. *The Estate of Poetry* comprises the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures delivered by Muir in 1955-56. By then the dissociation of which Mr. Ransom wrote had produced a working model of Doomsday, and though Muir's book is not apocalyptic

[1] In writing this essay, I would have preferred to avoid controversy by setting out my own opinions without reference to the contrary opinions of other people. But my essay developed so particularly in response to the interviews I have quoted that it would have been difficult and even dishonest to leave them out. Because I have no appetite for the enmity that often goes with literary controversy, I would like to say that I intend no disrespect toward these poets themselves, even when I obviously dislike some of their opinions.

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it is informed by the historical urgency that burdens his later poems. Applied science (not necessarily "applied" by scientists) had had its tour de force in World War II, and Muir had understood the ferocious logic that was upon us.

Because of the proliferation of so-called protest poetry, and the widespread involvement of poets in public issues, after about 1964, it became possible to suppose that the concerns of Ransom and Muir had become somewhat dated. For a while during the sixties I hoped, and even believed, that the effort of many poets to speak out against public outrages might recover some of the lost estate of poetry; and I think that I was by no means the only one who hoped and believed this. But the political "involvement" of poets appears now to have subsided, leaving the "effective range and influence" of poetry no larger than before.

Having had several years in which to write my own protests, and several more in which to consider them and their effect, I conclude that I was wrong. I do not mean that I feel the protests to have been wrong, or that I would not—or that I do not now—protest against the outrages that I know to be taking place. I was wrong in assuming that protest, in itself, might alter the status of poetry. Poetry remains a specialized art, its range and influence so constricted that poets have very nearly become their own audience.

The primary aspect of specialization is practical; the specialist withdraws from responsibility for everything not comprehended by his specialty. Each specialization, Mr. Ransom says, "has had to resist the insidious charms of aesthetic experience before its own perfection could arise." But this is a perfection of a kind never before contemplated in human history—a perfection that depends upon the abandonment of all the old ideals of harmony, symmetry, balance, order, in favor of the singular totalitarian ideal of control, which is typically achieved by leaving out or discounting or destroying whatever is not subject to control. Our achievement of this sort of control over certain particles of the creation has given rise to the supposition that such control is possible on a much grander scale, which would permit us to bring nature and history into line with our intentions. There is no need, I think, to dwell upon the moral degeneracy, the spiritual misery, the abuses and wastes of power that are the result of this ambition. And of course we are every day surrounded by more evidence of its futility. Human control on any grand scale is impossible, and the

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technological and political controls that *are* possible are frequently the opposite of order; any viable human order must come to terms with the impossibility of an absolute control.

The so-called practical disciplines, then, shrugged off the claims of esthetics—among other things. Their withdrawal from the concern for esthetics defined that as the proper "field" for artists. And the artists specialized their various disciplines, Mr. Ransom says, by breaking down "the union of beauty with goodness and truth," which until then was "common enough to be regarded as natural." In reaction to the utilitarianism of other disciplines, the arts became defiantly non-utilitarian.

It is immediately necessary to amend Mr. Ransom's version of the modern role of the poet. First it must be made to accommodate his own obvious concern with the larger responsibilities of poets—likewise that of Allen Tate, one of whose poems Mr. Ransom cites as an example of the "obscure" or unmoral poem. One must mention such self-consciously "national" poets as Yeats, Williams, and MacDiarmid, and a poet so determinedly a teacher as Pound. It must be said that some poets have resisted the claims of beauty, that others have attempted to be moralists or mages or priests or politicians. So much said, it remains true that the poet is isolated and specialized, and that the old union of beauty, goodness and truth is broken. It remains true that, in Muir's words, "The public has become one of the subjects of poetry, but is no longer its audience."

I believe that the sudden rise and growth of the genre of the interview is itself a symptom of the specialization of poetry, and that it reveals some of the dangers. It suggests, as a sort of implied premise, that poets are of a different kind from other people; hence the interest in what they *say* as opposed to what they write. (The popularity of poetry readings, which about parallels the vogue of the interview, probably owes something to the same feeling, though I believe that the readings have a more legitimate function.) There has come to be a class of what might be called poet watchers, who seem to be convinced that, whereas their own lives are routine and dull the life of poets is constantly "different" and exciting. Judging from their tone and their lack of controversy, I conclude that most interviews with poets are conducted by poet watchers. The purpose cannot be a dialogue between two beings of the same general kind; that, surely, would lead to hard questions or, better, to argument.

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Nor can the purpose be to learn what the poet has to say about his art, for that could be better done in an essay; if it is to be done at all, it *ought* to be done in an essay. The idea, obviously, is to *examine* the poet, to study as unobtrusively as possible whatever privacies may be disclosed by the inadvertences of conversation. The interviewer operates in a blind of obsequiousness, hoping the poet will reveal himself as the strange creature *he really is*. The interviewer and his intended readers are so convinced of the poet's otherness that they need to stand in his presence and say, "Well, well, so that's a poet." At a poetry reading once I sat behind a group of such spectators who passed back and forth during the entire evening a pair of huge binoculars.

But poet watchers have a limitation in common with bird watchers. Some essential things will not be revealed to them, because their interest is too direct, too imbued with the excitement of a special occasion. They are too much agog. They cannot relate to a poet on the basis of the casual happenstance that they are fellow creatures and contemporaries. If to an attentiveness appropriately critical and calm, the words of a poet reveal something extraordinary, then an extraordinary response is certainly in order. But it is better to be agape afterwards than agog beforehand.

The poet watcher is a kind of absurdity. But insofar as they have helped to create him, and to the degree that they indulge or exploit or need his excitement, there is also an absurdity in poets. There is apparently now some widespread feeling among poets themselves that they are of a different kind, hence have some special explaining to do. And this explaining often involves an advocacy of the very ideas and conditions that made the explanation necessary in the first place.

One of the oldest doctrines of the specialist-poet is that of the primacy of language and the primacy of poetry. He has made virtually a religion of his art, a religion based not on what he has in common with other people, but on what he *does* that sets him apart from them. For poets who believe in this way, a poem is not a point of clarification or connection between himself and the world on the one hand and between himself and the reader on the other, nor is it an adventure into any reality or mystery outside himself. It is a seeking of self in words, the making of a word-world in which the word-self may be at home. The poet goes to his poem as other people have gone to the world or to God—for a sense of his own reality.

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Louis Simpson, for instance, says to an interviewer: "I have a very funny sense of myself in the poem—I'm not talking about me, I'm talking about how the poems make a self for me." Later he says of himself and some of his contemporaries: "we had to be devoted to poetry for its own sake."[2] And Mark Strand says: "I have the feeling that I am a metaphor for my own being."[3]

It may be argued, as Mr. Ransom does, that this emphasis was in some sense forced upon poets by their peculiar isolation in a society dominated by specialists of more practical kinds. But this way of looking at language and at poetry also completes and enforces the isolation of poets, not just within a sort of literary ghetto or subghetto, but within themselves. Mark Strand is evidently not the only poet who would say that "the self in a sense is all we have left."

This feeling is more particularly documented by Philip Levine, who anticipates, beyond the limits of his isolation, a reader—but an ideal reader with whom he may be in touch only by his poetry, with whom he will have no common ground except his poetry. Commenting on his assumption that he has no readers in his native city, he says to his interviewer: "I think it's terrific. I have a Detroit that vanished about 1952 for all I know, when I left. I live it, it's in my head, and it's got nothing to do with what's back there now. It's the life I lived back there and the lives it included, and that's what I'm trying to transform into poetry, and if it could only make it with people living in Detroit it wouldn't be any good anyhow." The world, then, is usable for poetry only after it has been totally subsumed in the self. Mr. Levine goes on to say of a visit to Spain: "By the end of the year the landscape seemed me, seemed like a projection of my own inner being. I felt that when I looked at the Spanish landscape I was looking at a part of myself."[4]

The world that once was mirrored by the poet, has become the poet's mirror. This explains, I think, the emphasis upon personal terror and suffering and the fear of death in much recent poetry. When the self is one's exclusive subject and limit, reference and measure, one has no choice but to make a world of words. And this gives to one's own suffering and death the force of cataclysm.

But the difficulties are more than personal. For one thing, the subject of poetry is not words; it is the world, which poets have in

[2] *The Ohio Review*, Spring 1973.
[3] *The Ohio Review*, Winter 1972.
[4] *American Poetry Review*, Nov.-Dec. 1972.

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common with other people. It has been argued that modern poets were forced to turn inward by the disposition of their materialistic societies to turn outward. But that argument ignores or discounts the traditions that have always bound poetry to the concerns and values of the spirit. This ancient allegiance gives poets the freedom, and perhaps the moral imperative, to turn outward. It is surely no accident that Yeats, perhaps the most spiritual poet in our language in our era, was also perhaps the most political. In relation to the world, the specialization of poetry is exactly analogous to the specialization of religion. Putting exclusive emphasis upon a world of words has the same result as putting exclusive emphasis upon heaven: it leads to, and allows, and abets the degradation of the world. And it leads ultimately to the degradation of art and religion. Renunciation of the world may sustain religious or artistic fervor for a while, but sooner or later it becomes suicidal.

This exclusive emphasis upon language leads also to the degradation of general literacy. Not so long ago it was generally thought that in order to be a writer a person needed to lead "an exciting life" or that he needed extraordinary knowledge or experience. This, of course, frequently led to some sort of willful absurdity in the life of young writers. But it also suggested a connection—even a responsible connection—between art and experience or art and the world. What we have too frequently now—in the words of hundreds of poetry reviews in the time of my own coming of age—is the notion that what distinguishes a writer from a non-writer is, first and last, a gift and a love of *language*. He is not, that is, distinguished by his knowledge or character or vision or inspiration or the story he has to tell; he is distinguished by his specialty. This is a difference not of degree, but of kind. And the resulting absurdities are greater than before, and more dangerous. The power of such notions among the college-bred is suggested by a statement of Mr. John W. Dean III: "I would still like to be a writer. Maybe I will write a book. I love to play with words and twist phrases. I always play scrabble."[5] If both writer and reader assume that the writer's gift makes him a person of a radically different kind, then it must follow that writer and reader have nothing to learn from each other. There is no longer any meaningful passage of influence between writer and audience. If the writer acquires a "knack" for language much as one acquires a birthmark, then the reason for

[5] Mary McGrory, "The Dean Story," in the Louisville *Courier-Journal*, May 16, 1973.

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reading a book can only be the same as for watching television: to divert one's mind from its concerns. A distinguished writer is of course distinguished by his language, which is certainly his gift and his love. But his language is, after all, the common tongue, to which his gift is uncommon grace and power; without his commonness we could not recognize or value his distinction.

One of the first obligations of poets is certainly to purify the language of the tribe—but *not* merely to write poems with it. The language of the tribe used by a specialist-poet to produce a poem "for its own sake" can only describe the boundaries of an imprisoning and damning selfhood. Joyce Carol Oates says, writing of Sylvia Plath: "When the epic promise of 'One's-self I sing' is mistaken as the singing of a separate self, and not the Universal self, the results can only be tragic."[6] There is a sense of balance that is missing from the atmosphere that now surrounds much of the writing and much of the criticism of poetry. This sense of balance would lead and lead again to the poet's place of responsibility between his readers and his subject—*which is also his readers' subject.* It would see words as fulcrums across which intelligence must endlessly be weighed against experience.

Another common ground is tradition—the awareness and the use of the tradition that poets have in common with all the other sharers of the heritage of literature, writers and readers, living and dead—the tradition that is, moreover, the consciousness of the inheritance conveyed to us, whether we know or acknowledge it or not, in the language we speak. But literary talk nowdays seems remarkable for its lack of interest in tradition. The poets in the interviews are preoccupied with the new, with the modern world and modern times. They speak of very few poets who began to publish before World War II, almost none who lived before this century. Some of these poets seem to relate to the past simply by lack of interest. Others show a sort of vindictiveness against it, typically expressed in extremely generalized condemnations of traditional forms. Mark Strand says that:

> *we* [my emphasis] distrust rhyme because it sounds a little tinny, a little false, a little decorative, and a little unnatural. The point of writing . . . plain-style verse . . . is to affect as much as possible the naturalness of conversation, or plain discourse, not overly-excited discourse. Rhymes would get in the way . . . I'm not talking about my own poetry when I

[6] *The Southern Review*, Summer 1973.

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> say this. I'm sure Galway Kinnell and Robert Mezey . . . would not ever write in meters or rhyme.

Mr. Strand then immediately confuses the issue by saying: ". . . I've rhymed fairly recently, and I find it useful. I don't mind that, and I don't mind meters either. It sometimes seems quite natural to me."

Adrienne Rich apparently feels no such ambivalence. Her interviewer says: "Not many people anymore, not many poets anymore, talk very much, or feel they need to talk much, about form. Right?" And Ms. Rich replies: "Right! Or think very much about it." She calls Yeats "that table-rapping fascist," and says of her inability "to use the literature of the past": "I can't . . . read a poem by Yeats and feel somebody is talking to me whose voice I need to hear."[7]

William Matthews falls into line on the issue of traditional form, but his remarks on the subject are more elaborate, and they may afford some insight into the apparently widespread bias against form, traditional and otherwise. He believes, he says, "that one of the functions of art should be to disarrange patterns of certainty in the psyche . . ." This century has produced "a life that is organized all too well, and . . . we really need . . . to have our certainties shaken up badly." He says that it has never occurred to him to write in traditional forms because "I'm so much a believer in the notion of surprising yourself, and taking risks and preferring disorder to order, that it would be almost temperamentally impossible for me to do it."[8]

There are at least three false assumptions here: (1) that there is no form except "traditional form"; (2) that the employment or the pursuit of form can lead only to what has been predetermined; (3) that organization is necessarily synonymous with order. To the first of these assumptions it can of course be said that, though the interest in form may be traditional, it is certainly possible to invent or to discover forms that are not traditional. The second assumption, it seems to me, is based on a misunderstanding of the nature of form. The third assumption—of the identity of organization and order—is the most serious, because it fails to see the overwhelming disorder inherent in much, perhaps in most, Twentieth Century organization.

[7] *The Ohio Review*, Fall 1971.
[8] *The Ohio Review*, Spring 1972.

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The fear of chaos, Mr. Matthews maintains, originates with "people who get up every morning at eight o'clock, teach an Aesthetic theory class at 10, get the department mail at twelve o'clock, give a graduate student exam in the afternoon, go home and have two drinks before dinner." Maybe so. But it seems to me more likely that the *praise* of chaos must come from people whose lives are so safely organized. Mr. Matthews does concede that "There's a kind of chaos which is awful—the moment before civilizations collapse, or when three members of your immediate family or friends are killed." But I do not believe that people who have experienced chaos are apt to praise or advocate any degree or variety of it. And to make these distinctions between kinds and degrees of chaos is both fanciful and dangerous. Formlessness is, after all, neither civilized nor natural. It is a peculiarly human evil, without analogue in nature, caused by the failures of civilization: inattention, irresponsibility, carelessness, ignorance of consequence. It is the result of the misuse of power. It is neither house nor field nor forest, but rather a war or the spoil bank of a strip mine, where the balance between stability and change has been overthrown. The reason we need to have our certainties shaken is so that we may see the possibility of better orders than we have.

Behind these and other perfunctory dismissals of traditional form there seems to be a feeling that these forms are not "organic." But I have begun to wonder if the distinction between organic and traditional is not false. A better set of terms, I think, would be organic and mechanical. There are some sonnets, for instance, of which the form is organic; others of which it is mechanical. The difference apparently lies in the nature of the poem's conception and in the appropriateness or expressiveness of the form. And I do not see why a traditional verse-form might not belong with perfect propriety to what Denise Levertov calls the "constellation" of the experiences that make a poem.[9]

It may be necessary to question how much importance poets assign to statements they make to interviewers. But that Mr. Strand and Ms. Rich and Mr. Matthews spoke so casually and so generally of this matter of tradition and form, knowing that they spoke for publication, seems to imply an assumption that they spoke for many of their contemporaries. And though I am not sure

[9] "Some Notes on Organic Form," *The Poet in the World*.

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how these statements are meant, they sound compulsively fashionable; they appear to have that eagerness to be contemporary and up-to-date that identifies the modern cult of originality. That this eagerness to replace the old with the new justifies itself by the alleged uniqueness of the strains and demands of the modern world does not necessarily ennoble it: the modern world is after all largely the product of merchandisers, whose argument has been essentially the same.

Contemporaneity, in the sense of being "up with the times," is of no value. A competent wakefulness to experience—as well as to instruction and example—is another matter. But what we call the modern world is not necessarily, and not often, the real world, and there is no virtue in being up-to-date in it. It is a false world, based upon economies and values and desires that are fantastical—a world in which millions of people have lost any idea of the resources, the disciplines, the restraints, and the labor necessary to support human life, and who have thus become dangerous to their own lives and to the possibility of life. The job now is to get back to that other perennial and substantial world in which we really do live, in which the foundations of our life will be visible to us, and in which we can accept our responsibilities again within the conditions of necessity and mystery. In that world all competently wakeful and responsible people, dead, living, and unborn, are contemporaries. And that is the only contemporaneity worth having.

What is needed is work of durable value; the time or age of it matters only after the value has been established. That a good poet is our contemporary reassures us of the continuing liveliness of certain possibilities; it is a value. The contemporaneity of a worthless poet is, by the same token, a depressant. But there is much that we need that we cannot get from our contemporaries—even assuming that the work we have from them is the best that is possible: they cannot give us the sense of the longevity of human experience, the sense of the practicable, of *proven* possibility, that we get from older writing. Our past is not merely something to depart from; it is to commune with, to speak with. "Day unto day uttereth speech, and night onto night showeth knowledge." Remove this sense of continuity, and we are left with the thoughtless present tense of machines. If we fail to see that we live in the same world that Homer lived in, then we not only misunderstand Homer; we misunderstand ourselves. The past is our definition. We may strive,

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with good reason, to escape it, but we will escape it only by adding something better to it.

If, as I believe, one of the functions of tradition is to convey a sense of our perennial nature, and of the necessities and values that are the foundation of our life, then it follows that without a live tradition we are necessarily the prey of fashion: we have no choice but to emulate in the arts the "practical" men of commerce and industry whose mode of life is distraction of spirit and whose livelihood is the out-dating of fads.

Isolated by the specialization of their art—by their tendency to make a religion of poetry or to make a world out of words, and by their preoccupation with the present and the new—poets of modern times seem to run extreme occupational risks. James Dickey says: "I think there is a terrible danger in the overcultivation of one's sensibilities, and that's what poets are forced to do in order to become poets." And: "In order to create poetry, you make a monster out of your own mind." He explains that some poets use alcohol or other drugs, first to coax the monster, and then to protect themselves from it. He mentions, as victims, Berryman, Crane, and Dylan Thomas, and calls poetry one of the most dangerous occupations in the world. But he believes that most of the victims have been content with their bargain: "Because the moments of intensity which do lead to delight and joy and fulfillment are so much better than those that other people have."[10]

The word "monster" is used in a perhaps similar way in the 285th of Berryman's *Dream Songs*. The poem speaks of Henry's struggling and darkness and confusion, and then says that "he took in his stride/more than most monsters can." It ends:

> Henry peered quite alone
> as if the worlds would answer to a code
> just around the corner, down gelid dawn,
> beckoning like a moan.

I think Mr. Dickey's mention of the use of drugs may give too limited a definition to the danger he is talking about, for associated with the possibility of dependence on a drug is the possibility of a dependence on pain, a symbiosis in which a poet's work feeds on a suffering which, in turn, the work elaborates and augments, and again feeds on.

[10] *Playboy*, November 1973.

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But what I mainly want to question in Mr. Dickey's statement is the assumption that this monstrousness of mind and this suffering are necessary to the art of poetry. There is no denying the evidence that poetry *can* be produced in this way—at least for a while. And history certainly offers examples of unhappy or obsessed or mad poets, but it offers more examples of poets who sang or wrote in the exuberance of sanity, health, wholeness of spirit. And this century's record of poets whose lives have ended in early ruin is probably unique. One instantly credits Anne Sexton's statement that "Pain engraves a deeper memory"[11] not because one believes that it invariably does, but because one senses, in the modesty and brevity of the sentence, the probability that it *sometimes* does. But one can only be suspicious of the conclusion of the "afterthought" of Robert Lowell's *Notebook*: "In truth I seem to have felt mostly the joys of living; in remembering, in recording, thanks to the gift of the Muse, it is the pain."[12] One is simply aware of too much joyous poetry that has been the gift of the Muse, who obviously leaves the ratio of pain and joy to be determined by the poet. To attribute to the Muse a special fondness for pain is to come too close to desiring and cultivating the pain. There is, I believe, some currency to the assumption that a fragmented and diseased people can make a whole and healthy art out of their fragmentation and disease. It has not yet been done. Yeats says that "neither scholars nor the populace have sung or read anything generation after generation because of its pain."[13]

The danger may not be so much in the overcultivation of sensibility as in its *exclusive* cultivation. Sensibility becomes the inescapable stock in trade of the isolated poet, who is increasingly cut off from both song and story because the nature of these is communal. And isolation, or the sense of isolation, is moving much of our poetry toward the tone, rhythm and structure of what Mark Strand calls "not overly excited discourse." This is what Denise Levertov calls "an unexampled production of *notations*: poems which tell of things seen or done, but . . . do not impart a sense of the experiencing of seeing or doing, or of the *value* of such experience . . ." And she says that "The lack of a unifying in-

[11] *The Paris Review,* Number 52.
[12] Third edition, 1970.
[13] "A General Introduction for My Work," *Essays and Introductions.*

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telligence, of the implicit presence of an interpreting spirit behind the notation, is associated—and not accidentally—with a lack of music."[14]

I find it impossible to believe that song can come from or lead to a sense of isolation. If a poet says, "I vnto my selfe alone will sing," as Spenser does at the beginning of his "Epithalamion," he can only mean that he does so in anticipation of accompaniment or at least of company. A poet who felt assured that he sang to himself alone would soon find his song lapsing diffidently into a "not overly excited discourse" on the subject of isolation, guilt, suffering, death and oblivion—the self-exploiting autobiography of disconnected sensibility.

Song is natural; we have it in common with animals. It is also traditional; it has to be sung *to* someone, who will have to recognize it as a song. Rhythm is fundamental to it, and is its profoundest *reference*. The rhythm of a song or a poem rises, no doubt, in reference to the pulse and breath of the poet, as is often said, but that is still too specialized an accounting; it rises also in reference to daily and seasonal—and surely even longer—rhythms in the life of the poet and in the life that surrounds him. The rhythm of a poem resonates with these larger rhythms that surround it; it fills its environment with sympathetic vibrations. Rhyme, which is a function of rhythm, may suggest this sort of resonance; it marks the coincidences of the rhythm of the structure with the rhythm of the lines, or the coincidences of smaller structures with larger ones, as when the day, the month, and the year all end at the same moment. Song, then, is a force opposed to specialty and to isolation. It is the testimony of the singer's inescapable relation to the world, to the human community, and also, I think, to tradition.

But even more suggestive of the specialization of contemporary poets is their estrangement from story-telling. Typically, one can find this debility cited as a virtue and a goal. In an interview that is in general far more carefully spoken and better considered than most, Galway Kinnell says: "I would like a poem to be able to be free of narrative." One needs to know the reasons that lie behind this statement, but the interview does not produce them. Mr. Kinnell says only that "If a poem could be free of narrative altogether, it would at least open the possibility that some truth

[14] "Great Possessions," *The Poet in the World.*

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could be said directly rather than by parable."[15] But he is never asked the two obvious questions: how this might be possible, and why it might be desirable.

(I acknowledge a certain unfairness, here as earlier, in disagreeing with a poet's statement in the absence of his argument. I assume, however, that the general absence, in these interviews, of the questions that would have produced the arguments is, in itself, an implied point. Or, rather, it implies one or the other of two possible points: (1) that the statements are all so widely credited that there is no apparent need to explain or support them; or (2) that specialization imposes an ethic or etiquette which automatically concedes the virtue of anything whatever that a poet says about poetry.)

Though the suppression of narrative has not been directly advocated, there can be no question that the narrative power of poetry has been in decline for generations, until now it is little more than inadvertent. Our century has produced several poems that poets and readers have called "epic," but both character and story, in the old sense of the terms, are absent from them all. ("Epic," as the word is now often used, seems to mean little more than major or ambitious or long.) That so accomplished a poet as Galway Kinnell now speaks of the suppression of narrative as a goal is, it seems to me, a serious matter, especially as it is only the latest in a series of programs to renew or purify poetry by reducing its means. Why is it necessary for poets to believe, like salesmen, that the new inevitably must replace or destroy the old? Why cannot poetry renew itself and advance into new circumstance by *adding* the new to the old? Why cannot the critical faculty, in poets and critics alike, undertake to see that *the best* of the new is grafted to *the best* of the old? Free verse, for instance, is a diminishment of the competence of poetry if it is seen as *replacing* traditional prosody; it is an enlargement only if it is conceived as an addition. Freedom from narrative is a diminishment—it is not even a freedom—unless it is included with the capability of narrative among the live possibilities of poetry. To attempt to advance by more taking away is not to bring into view a renewed and newly powerful art. It heads us instead toward what Mr. Kinnell himself warns against: "the other possibility, that to exist at all poetry will simply give up its old ambitions and adapt

[15] *The Ohio Review*, Fall 1972.

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itself to what is, that it will simply become the expression of a reality from which all trace of the sacred has been removed."

But this weakening of narrative in poetry—whether by policy, indifference, or debility—may be one of the keys to what is wrong with us, both as poets and as people. It is indicative of a serious lack of interest, first, in action, and second, in *responsible* action. Muir said that "the story, although it is our story, is disappearing from poetry." And he said: "The old story . . . followed some figure—Odysseus, or Ruth, or King David—through time; and it remains the most pure image that we have of temporal life, tracing the journey which we shall take." Narrative poetry records, contemplates, hands down the actions of the past. Poetry has a responsibility to remember and to preserve and reveal the truth about these actions. But it also has a complementary responsibility that is equally public: to help to preserve and to clarify the *possibility* of responsible action. Ezra Pound, perhaps more than anyone else in our time, insisted on this as the social value of "the damned and despised *litterati*:" "When their work goes rotten . . . when their very medium, the very essence of their work, the application of word to thing goes rotten, i.e. becomes slushy and inexact, or excessive or bloated, the whole machinery of social and of individual thought and order goes to pot."[16] The word *order*, as used here, clearly refers to the possibility of responsible *action*, the possibility of good work.

But our malaise, both in our art and in our lives, is that we have lost sight of the possibility of right or responsible action. Publicly we have delegated our capacity to act to men who are capable of action only because they cannot think. Privately, as in much of our poetry, we communicate by ironic or cynical *allusions* to that debased tale of futility, victimization, and defeat, which we seem to have elected to be our story. The prevailing tendency, in poetry and out, is to see people not as actors, but as sufferers. John Berryman's dream songs, brilliant as they sometimes are, what are they but the mortifications of a splendid intelligence helpless before its salient occasions? To how great an extent is modern poetry the record of highly refined sensibilities that could think or feel but not do? And must not this passiveness of the poetic sensibility *force* its withdrawal into the world of words where, for want of the sustenance of action, it becomes despondent and self-destructive?

[16] "How to Read," *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound.*

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"Poems," wrote Mrs. Randall Jarrell, "flew at him . . . until just words beat at his head like many wings."[17]

In the last ten years there has been a reaction against this passivity. But for the most part this has produced only protest, which is either a gesture and not an action at all, or a negative action which either repudiates or opposes. The shallowness of protest is in this negativity; it is also in the short-winded righteousness by which it condemns evils for which it accepts no responsibility. In itself, protest implies no discipline and no correction. "A public man," Edwin Muir wrote, "is a man who is entitled to be listened to by the public; a great public man is one who can tell his public on occasion, what he thinks of them, knowing that they will listen. This was the position which Yeats achieved, alone among the poets of his time." That we have no poets who are, in that sense, public persons suggests even more forcibly the weakness of our poetry of protest. In his protest the poet is speaking publicly, but not as a spokesman; he is only one outraged citizen *speaking at* other citizens who do not know him, whom he does not know, and with whom he does not identify. The tone of self-righteousness is the inevitable way of accepting and bearing the burden of this circumstance.

In "Poets without Laurels," Mr. Ransom holds that the specialization of poetry was "inevitable" because of the specialization of the age, though he ventures that "the modern program, on the whole, is not the one under which men maintain their best health and spirits." Muir, on the other hand, does not look upon the alienation of poets from their audience as inevitable. *The Estate of Poetry* is remarkable for the practicality of its purpose; it faces up to the social and historical context of the problem, and then it argues toward a solution: "Public indifference may be expected to continue, but perhaps the audience will increase when poetry loses what obscurity is left in it by attempting greater themes, for great themes have to be treated clearly. A great theme greatly treated might still put poetry back in its old place." And at the end of his book Muir wrote: "There remains the temptation for poets to turn inward into poetry, to lock themselves into a hygienic prison where they speak only to one another, and to the critic. . . . In the end a poet must create his audience and to do that he must turn outward."

[17] "The Group of Two" in Lowell, et al, *Randall Jarrell 1914-1965*.

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It may be that poets can make this outward turn and regain the great themes only by taking up again their old interest in action—by renewing the knowledge and meaning of actions known from the past, and by considering the possibility of *right* action now and in the future. Perhaps they will have to repudiate these purely negative actions by which we dissociate ourselves from other people. It is certain that there are better actions. There are actions worthy of the patience and work of whole lives—actions, even, that no whole life can complete—that involve the lives of people in the lives of places and communities. Without such actions, both in life and in art, the consciousness of our people will be fragmentary. How can we explain what Berryman called "the mysterious late excellence" of William Carlos Williams, if not by his community life as a doctor, that carried his art again and again to the test and the renewal of action? And must not the late excellence of Yeats have been indebted to his passionate involvement in the fate of Ireland?

We would be ungrateful and stupid to turn our backs on the work of inward-turned poets. That work contains much of value that we need to cherish and learn from. It is only necessary to understand that that work has flourished upon, and has fostered, a grievous division between life and work, as have virtually all the other specialized disciplines of our time, and that that division has made it possible for work to turn upon and exploit and destroy life.

There is in reality no such choice as Yeats's "Perfection of the life, or of the work." The decision to sacrifice either one for the sake of the other becomes ultimately the fatal disease of both. The division implied by this proposed choice is destructive because it is based upon a misconception of the relation between work and life. The perfections of work rise out of, and commune with and in turn inform, the perfections of life—as Yeats himself knew and as other poems of his testify. The *use* of life to perfect work is an evil of the specialized intellect. It makes of the most humane of disciplines an exploitive industry.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

The Cowshed Blues

Exsurge, gloria mea; exsurge, psalterium et cithara

Intro

Intent in the
night in the
cone of light
  writing

Vamp

Or what's called
  writing
though words must come
throb by throb
  through the membrane
of the great black drum

16 bar theme

It was a cowshed when he took it
a one-cow barn beside a brook
in a cove of alder and birch

floor of plank and rank urine, the wooden
stanchel worn in a cow's long wintertimes
heavy with animal woe

in the back wall
was a hole
with a board flap
hinged on a harness strap

where they shoveled through
the manure
onto the manure pile
once in a while

so he made a window where the hole was
a table and a stove, and sought the grace
words give for love in a writing place

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Piano break

Light on the page and all else
the raging dark

12 bar theme

And tonight the shed rides free and the cove
its alders and birches
falls downward among the stars

because intensity does this, a mind
out of time, out of place—
body a field of forgotton wars

and making does this, the breakthrough
to a great beat throbbing
in a place without place

o moment, moment pure
he is an undetermined existence
part of eternity, gone in inner space

Stop-time chorus, trombone

Soaring
on the modes
of sound
the modulations

moving
over and through
the pulses
of his love

known by no name now
although
a muse of everlasting
voluptuousness is aware of him

and the particular
tones follow
one another
freely inexorably

Scat chorus

Cow now . starflow . the slow
beat . over and over . flies .

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ow . the cords . the blood
urine and dung . how
flying . chains in the neck of
hathor . perpetual beating .
her womb . beating . hot eyes .
now . beating . a great flying .
and pain . and beating . now

Two choruses ad lib, trumpet

What our people have never known
but always felt
in the mystery of the word

is a force
contained but not expressed
spoken and unexplained—

for meaning falls away
as the stars in their spirals
fall from the void of creation

how simple and how necessary
this discipline! which is the
moment added to moment of being

movement added to movement
notes in the throat of the horn
being and being and being

dying, born and he
is alone, free
the creator of what he must be

Vamp, guitar and bass

"Holiness," he says
hearing an unexpected
modulation:
at the point of flow
always this beat, this beat
repeated
instant of everything he knows
now forever existing here
it must
be holiness

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Out-chorus

And blues is also
  a crying in the night
exhaustion, constriction
  in the cone of light

and he looks up sighing
  to the dark glass
where looking back at him
  is his father's face

Stop-time bridge, clarinet

All's fallen back
  back
collapsing into time
  time
 the beat of the great drum is going
  going
in the wind in the trees
  in the wind in the trees

Ride out, half-time

It is his face now
his own his
  old in a moment
  miseries, histories

his and his father's
reflected little things
  among others of this earth
  the alders and the birch

* * *

Tag, drums

But the beat remains
the moment of purity somewhere
poised on its long
  flow far out, far in

Tutti

or on this page fallen
  notations of remembered song.

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Alba

At this hour the refrigerator throbs,
it does not hum.
Is this the refrigerator?
Alba lux is throbbing, dilating
tremulous from behind the mountain,
the premonitory glow, colorless,
and the mirror is dark.
Whose face is there? Whose—
pallid and blear?
This throbbing is the house
of the day's meat, colorless flesh,
to be eaten again, always.
Missa solemnis over the world
spreading, light unto dark,
light on the dirty snow of April,
on the face in the snow-mirror,
'till the watchman on the tower cry,
oh, oh, there were times and times,
music in the light, leaves in the play of light.
Wouldst thou hear what words can say
in a little? Reader,
whose words are these? What
pronoun must be inserted here
in bower, in flower?
Io, Isis! Hathor! *that sometime did . . .*
with naked foot . . .
And so much joy was expended,
yes, even the decade of anguish,
music and the thought that was music,
golden lads and girls all must . . .
Watchman, who will be hanged today?
The mirror melts, the snow seeps,
and the meat in the house, colorless, stirs
and rises into lifelikeness,
a world throbs, the monotone
solemn and meaningless—
without meaning,

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the eating, the eaten.
Was there a time? There was a time
and it was of a sweet noise,
doutz brais e critz,
for the woman who was Sophia
and for the parting, for *alba lux,*
a parting worth a song—
meaning it meant something,
a time, a year of meaning
and the light shimmered.
Petals shimmered also on the tree
nearby the waters of Gihon,
nearby the mountain of Golgotha.
But the name of the mountain is Whiteface,
and the mill-dam washed out, Gihon
is loose, smashed in the longest winter.
The mirror drips, the light is tarnished.
No one is here, is that clear?
No one. The pronoun is you.
Whom will you forsake today?

Good Friday, 1974

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KIM WALLER

The Undoing

The old ice wears thin, thinner,
eroding to breakup. The rotten
lid of the pond quivers in gusts
as if bodies were rolling beneath it.
At the torn edge, a pure slit of light.

We scrawl KEEP OFF on a stick—
a warning to kids that the world will be water
by nightfall, the cattail margins mud
for the muskrat's feet.
March again!
I am worn out already with process:

the shriek of frogs all night
in their scummy hollows,
their jellies, orgies, wars; the effort
of speech in a rising wind,
the effort of silence in birthing.

What secrets are left to rip open?
Out in the garden, winter's mulch
is needled to death in the morning rain,
already the weeds flex. Wherever we step
we sink in, moving through glacial ruts.

My love, I am not my own woman.
Today the wind walks through me
and over the field where last year's grasses
bend a little, and straighten again.
The old griefs recur, recur,

build and digest themselves like a soil,
like history—the bloodspot on the egg.
I no longer know what is mine or the world's.
I no longer know my sorrow in loving
from the sorrow of those I have loved.

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JOYCE CAROL OATES

The Widows

WHY WAS SHE DRAWN TO THE TELEPHONE?—it was not ringing. She found herself walking out of her way, through the narrow hall, where the telephone was kept on a small pedestal table beneath the stairs. Even during the day it was dark in this part of the house; there were not many windows and she didn't want to waste money on electricity. She knew the passageway so well that she moved through it with the stiff, alert confidence of the blind. Why bother with a telephone? She meant to have it disconnected.

Sometimes it did ring. And she listened to it, bitterly. She might be in the kitchen, at the table: a small cleared-off space at one corner of the table, *her* space. She ate there, absent-mindedly, quickly, while she read. If the telephone rang she listened to it with a kind of respectful distaste: a call could be only a disappointment or an insult. Or a wrong number. It was strange, it might even have been exhilarating—she would have to think about the possibilities—the fact that no one, no one at all, could have anything valuable to tell her. A telephone call could only be a bad joke.

Yet she found herself wandering along the passageway, distracted and vaguely expectant. As if she were about to receive an important call. When the telephone call had come from the hospital, some months before, of course she had not expected it—she might have been expecting a call from someone else, in fact, a house painter with his estimate of what it would cost them, to have this shabby little house repainted—so she had answered it easily enough, neither eager nor terrified. Now she drifted near the phone and stood there, in the dark. If it rang she had the option of answering or not answering: that was freedom. Her mother, her in-laws, anyone who cared to communicate with her could write to her—if they liked—if they imagined that anything they might say would mean much to her. She might even reply, eventually.

One evening in late August she went to the telephone and as she approached it, it began to ring. She smiled. She smiled knowingly. For a few moments she resisted; then she picked up the receiver. She said nothing. She hoped it might be a wrong number, so that she could replace the receiver gently, in the middle of a stranger's

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query. But it was someone who called her by name, a woman, a woman people had wanted her to meet—another young widow—and before Beatrice could cut her off, the woman was suggesting that they meet for lunch sometime. Was she free? Would she be interested?

"Why are you telephoning me?" Beatrice stammered. "Why—what is it—Why are you harassing me?"

The woman paused. Then she began again, in a rather warm, aggressive voice, apologizing for bothering Beatrice—explaining that friends of friends had suggested she call—Manitock was such a small city, as Beatrice knew, of course people talked about one another constantly. And they were saying that Beatrice was not looking well; that she had resigned her teaching job; someone had even said she was—

Beatrice interrupted. She said, calmly: "Who are these people? I don't know these people. I don't know you. You're a stranger—why are you telephoning me? Haven't you anyone else to telephone tonight? There's no connection between us. This is insulting. It's degrading. If people worry about me it isn't me they are worrying about—is it?—I'm onto their games! If they want to worry about me, let them discover what it is in themselves they are afraid of. Where is the fear? It isn't in me, it's in all of you. The thought of death isn't in me, it's never in me; it's in the rest of you. If—please don't interrupt, Mrs. Greaney—if you have nothing else to do but gossip about me and clack your teeth about me, if Manitock is really so impoverished, that's unfortunate but it's hardly my fault, is it? Goodnight."

She dropped the receiver into place. She began to sob, pounding at her thighs and belly with her fists, not knowing what she did. The sobs were dry, hoarse; like laughter. She took the receiver off the hook so that the woman could not call her back.

She whispered: *Let me alone! Let him die! . . . Let me die!*

A few days later someone approached her, someone's wife, evidently a woman Beatrice had known in her former life—she had been *Mrs. Kern* in that life—and began reproving her, gently scolding her, for what she had said to Moira Greaney. The woman was middle-aged, maternal. Perhaps she had a right to speak to Beatrice and even to suggest that a misdeed, a crime of some kind, had been committed. "Why, what did I say?" Beatrice asked. "Did I say something? What did I say? I don't

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remember. Were you listening in on an extension?—are you someone I'm supposed to know?"

It was the drug that asked these questions, the aftermath of a drug—barbituates, because of her insomnia—and not Beatrice herself. Beatrice was angry. The drug altered her voice, made it sound only confused and innocent. She might have been lost in a foreign city instead of standing helpless in the Village Pharmacy, staring at a woman whose name she could not recall. Fortunately, the woman did not touch her. That might have meant she was really Beatrice's mother, a few pounds heavier, disguised crudely as a blond. Beatrice herself was angry, outraged, but the sounds she made were really quite child-like. So many short, abrupt, baffled questions—she was innocent of any crime, surely, and must be forgiven.

Innocent. Always so innocent. She no longer knew whether her extraordinary innocence was genuine, as much a part of her as her small, frail body, or whether it was a form of savage irony. Had she been less intelligent, her open-eyed bewilderment, her ceaseless questioning, might have been genuine. But she was too intelligent. Some part of her had developed too shrewdly, like a head that has grown out of the drowsy earth and can now gaze down upon it—a head on a long stalk—an eerie drunken-swaying stalk of a neck! But Wallace had not judged her so harshly. He had forbidden her to judge herself, in these censorious terms. Now he was dead, now the dates of his death and of his funeral were retreating, day by day, pages back on the calendar, so she had the freedom to say whatever she liked about herself. Other people talked about her, other people stated their opinions. Whispering. Worrying. Gleefully "worrying." She had the freedom to judge herself however she liked, as cruelly as she wished; she wanted no pity, not even from herself. But she could not quite imagine herself. *Beatrice Kern.* Before her marriage she had been *Beatrice Egleston,* but she was finished with that. That was done. . . . She could not analyze herself thoroughly enough, could not be certain that she understood the nature of the being she evidently inhabited. A face, a body. Yes. Fine. As usual. If the insides are secrets no one especially cares to know, the outside can at least be contemplated: that was the basis of life. But—what are the visions a mirror offers? The mirror is too friendly, demonically friendly, always distorting reality in order to give us back our own expectations. Always lying, always slanting, muffling. . . .

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So Beatrice did not know if she was that young woman whom everyone pitied, and who seemed pitiful indeed. A young wife who had lost her husband. *Lost her husband.* Other people lost gloves, books, tickets; or they lost at a game of cards. But Beatrice had lost her husband, which was tragic or freakish, depending. Across town was the *other widow,* who had also "lost" her husband, months before Wallace's death. A coincidence, in such a small town . . . among so small a circle of acquaintances. Two young widows, in their late twenties. Inevitable, hideous, that they should rush together, should embrace each other, should weep together while the rest of the community watched with solemn approval. . . .

Beatrice wandered around the house, a rented single-bedroom frame house not far from the university, murmuring to herself—not arguing, not angry—only befuddled. Sometimes she wept. Sometimes no tears came, only that dry wracking sob, a kind of chuckle. She taunted herself with the thought that perhaps she was weeping, mourning, because of the role she had to play—people were spying on her, demanding tears. She was a widow, childless. She was deathly, like all widows; she must acknowledge it.

She wondered when it would be concluded—when her husband would really die.

"Do you ever imagine—he might be trying to contact you?"

"No."

"Do you ever—do you—Would you want it, would you want him to communicate with you, if it were possible?"

"You're insane."

"But would you want it?"

"Want what? What are you saying?"

"—want *it*—"

"What is *it?* What kind of a joke is this? You're teasing me, you're trying to drive me crazy—you're crazy yourself and want me to become like you—"

"No. You can't become like me. You have to be yourself—you can only become yourself."

She was frightened of the other widow. Though she went out rarely—no more than three or four times in an entire week—she seemed to meet Moira Greaney all the time. But they were not friends, not even acquaintances. They knew each other only by

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sight. Manitock was not really so small, but it seemed small: once a mill town, a factory town built upon the banks of a river in upstate New Hampshire, now a university town in which everyone connected with the university knew everyone else. And most of them lived in town, in the radius of a few miles, because the mountains were so steep, the foothills so unfriendly, the only houses or farms available outside Manitock were very poor. Some were hardly more than shanties. The university itself was losing money. Beatrice had resigned her part-time position, teaching art history in night school, and no one had tried to argue her into keeping it. Possibly she would have been dismissed anyway—except for the embarrassing fact that she was the wife of a man who had died suddenly, in an automobile accident. The other widow was not so poor as Beatrice . . . not even childless, exactly, because her husband had a son somewhere, from his first marriage. *Do you wish you had had a baby? No. Yes. Were you waiting . . . ? Yes, we were waiting. Do you regret it now?* . . . She regretted nothing. She had very few emotions, no more than two or three. They narrowed, they expanded. They narrowed again. She took a book out of the town library, an income-tax guide, and saw that Moira Greaney had taken it out before her—the name printed in small block letters, in green ink.

She hiked out to the cemetery, north of town. It had an older section, for the natives; the newer section looked cheap, with tombstones and markers of polished stone, slick and neat. The old gravestones were battered, gray, some of the very old ones even encrusted with bird droppings—entirely natural, proper. What could be said about the newer graves, the newer deaths?—the younger people? A shame they died, that was about all. Beatrice considered the marker on her husband's grave adequate. It was adequate. She had already forgotten its price—it had been the least expensive of those markers currently available—and she could never remember what it was made of, perhaps granite. . . . The Greaney grave was nearby, slightly up-hill from the Kern grave. Better drainage. A better location. The stone was fairly large, must have been costly, but its front was black-gleaming and highly polished—so that it looked too prosperous for this place. It looked hearty, smug. There were potted geraniums around it and Beatrice detested geraniums and she taunted herself with the possibility of kicking them over . . . and hearing a cry . . . turning to see Mrs. Greaney running at her, running up the incline to her. *Why, your're a murderer!—only pretending to be in mourning!*

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More sanely, she considered the possibility of meeting the woman out here, in the cemetery. There was only one entrance, one way out. It could happen. . . . Once, on a Sunday, she lingered in the vicinity of her husband's and Mr. Greaney's graves, as if waiting. But no one came along.

That was in September. By November, she had given in.

"I am the catastrophe, the ugly disaster," Beatrice laughed. "My husband died in an accident. An eighteen-year-old boy ran into him broadside, he hit the driver's side of the car—going over seventy miles an hour, they said—running a four-way stop. The boy died and so did my husband. Instantly, they said. How did they know? With what authority do people say such things? . . . *Instantly. So he didn't suffer. It isn't much of a consolation, Mrs. Kern, but.* . . . When people see me, now, they think of disaster. The impact of one car on another, seventy miles an hour, the noise, the smashed metal, the way bodies must be ruined, so strangely, being only flesh. . . . They dread seeing me because what happened to my husband could happen to them, and it's an insult. They can't control it . . . it's a betrayal of their civilized lives . . . of sanity itself. My face reminds them of the closed casket. Their imaginations run wild, they're sickened, excited, they rush forward to pity me; but they wish I had died in the accident along with him. This place is too small to absorb me. . . . I remind them of something demonic, that goes against their God. Because they do have versions of God, their own kind of God, having to do with their brains, their reason. Their careers. All that is godly to them, because they have to worship something and so they worship themselves. But it can be changed in a few seconds. I don't blame them for hating me."

"They don't hate you. They're just a little frightened of you," Moira said. She was two years older than Beatrice, twenty-nine, but she looked younger—that wide, frank, freckled face, those blue eyes that protruded slightly, charmingly, as if everything fascinated her. She stared. She stared at Beatrice. Her stare came first, then her slow, friendly smile. Was she pleased? Always. Curious? Always. "Nobody hates you, Beatrice," she said. ". . . It's what I represent they really fear. It isn't so bad now, because he's been dead quite a while, but while he was dying, the last six weeks especially, I walked around like a criminal, I pitied people who happened to see me, because they were genuinely frightened of me.

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. . . That long, slow, protracted death . . . eighteen months of it . . . he wasn't as young as your husband, but he was too young to die, only forty-four, and whenever anyone saw me I knew he wanted to duck away, to hide. And the strained, absurd conversations!—their eyes grabbing at me, hoping I wouldn't say anything obscene. They dreaded the very word *cancer*. They dreaded me. . . . But now that he's dead people can see I'm still alive. I'm not a leper, I'm not contaminated with his disease. After all, death isn't contagious."

"Isn't it?" Beatrice said.

She was getting drunk. Her voice was wild, unpredictable. . . . She had noticed a mirror in the foyer, by a coat rack; she went to observe herself in this new role. But what was there to say?—whether "Beatrice" was an attractive woman or whether she was obscene, ugly, contaminated by death, she could not judge. Her skin was pale. But it was always pale, especially when she was tired. Her hair was dark, almost black. She had not bothered to remove the several silvery hairs she had discovered one morning, but no one noticed anyway. A delicate woman, hardly more than a girl. Her eyes were slanted or gave the appearance of being so, especially when she was intense or suspicious. Very dark eyes. But their expression was usually dreamy, inward, contemplative, as if she were engrossed with images inside her head.

Moira's face hovered near hers, in the mirror. But Moira was careful to stand some distance from Beatrice, not touching her. She was a tall woman—at least five feet nine—with broad shoulders, a wide, clear forehead, and ash-blond hair that stuck out around her head, in clumps of curls. Sometimes her hair was frizzy, messy. At other times it was striking: Beatrice had seen her on the street, occasionally, and had noticed how other people glanced at her, especially men. Her manner was brisk, hearty, almost oppressively healthy. "Nobody hates us, Beatrice. You shouldn't allow yourself to think that," she said. There was a subtle edge to her voice, as if the two of them had been quarrelling, off and on, all their lives.

Beatrice had telephoned the Greaney woman one night in November.

Unable to sleep, she had wandered downstairs, barefoot, thinking that she would sit in the kitchen for the rest of the night. She would be quite safe there. Walls painted a very light yellow, a refrigerator that hummed and rattled, linoleum tile of orange and brown. Warm colors. At her usual place, her feet primly up on the

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chair, arms around her knees. Like a child. She could sit there until dawn. It was well known that consciousness alters with daylight. She had faith in that. . . . From a distance, she heard the dry, heaving sobs. She heard her own voice, lifting in a question. *But when will it not be mad, so that I can return to it?* She closed her eyes. Listened. It was her own voice, cheerful and witty. Evidently time had passed. There was some confusion. When the sleeping pill did not work, confusion followed: like a storm at every window, while you are trying heroically to close one window. Resist? Give in? . . . She heard her own voice and the voices of others. She realized they were at a party. Of course. One of the many parties she had attended. She and her husband had had many friends, especially when they were in graduate school in Boston. Sitting in one another's apartments, late into the night. Talking. Arguing. Rarely getting drunk, because the value of their being together lay in their conversations.

Some of them, men and women both, had been daring, iconoclastic. Some had taken other roles: Beatrice herself had always sounded fairly conservative. All this was conversation. Personalities expressed in talk, in words. There was a kind of psychological chastity to it, harmless. Of course none of them had known this at the time. How energetically they had discussed all things, even the topics that dismayed their parents—even the forbidden things, the taboos. Sexual behavior. Sexual promiscuity. Deviance. The possibility of divorce. Of death. Of madness. Of suicide. Quite calmly, fearlessly, they had assumed the world was mad, anyway. What did it matter?—governments, social programs, philosophical principles. They knew everything. They knew everything in essence, if not in detail. And they were totally unmoved, undismayed, as if anything that might be expressed in words was already rendered quaint, its power to wound thwarted. It was even the fashion, for a while, not to know very much, to avoid reading newspapers. A young man, a close friend of Wallace's, had encouraged Beatrice to do graduate work involving a Maine artist of the nineteenth-century, and to turn her back on the "madness" of the contemporary world. Beatrice had replied, wittily, that the world has always been mad: one crisis after another, wars and the preludes to war, treaties, peace pacts, agreements, and then war again. How could he expect her, or anyone, to hide until the world returned to normal? It would never return to what he considered

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normal. In fact it was normal, at the present time; it was always normal. And when would it not be mad, so that she could safely return to it?

Anyway, she had said, she had no interest in dead men.

She remembered this conversation. Horrible, that she should both recall it, from the outside, as if she had been a third person observing the scene, and animate it, give life to her own words. She was not ashamed of herself, she was terrified. There was nothing for her to claim; nowhere to retreat to. She realized that she might possibly not survive. She had no interest in the dead and yet she had nothing else, no one else, except a dead man, whose features were already unclear, his voice dubious and vague, his love for her in all probability based upon a misunderstanding of her nature, which she had deliberately cultivated.

"I want. . . . I don't want. . . . I. . . . I'm not going to. . . ."

It was very late, nearly three o'clock in the morning, when she telephoned Moira Greaney.

Moira's husband had disappeared long before his death. Whoever remained had put up a struggle of some kind, assisted by the hospital staff, and he was now buried in the Manitock cemetery; she should sell the house on Fort Street, people advised, and return to her own life. But he was buried nearby. How could she leave? She had been very happy with him and was very happy now. No, she would not betray him. She paused before the windows of the local tourist agencies, staring at brightly-colored advertisements for travel. *Fly Away to India. Africa the Golden Continent.* No, she would not betray him, not again.

"Really. *Really.* Is that true."

"Is that *really true.*"

She stared at people, absorbed their remarks, marvelling almost with a vague note of protest at the most ordinary of disclosures. She could not help herself, perhaps. An intensity of interest in other people, an exaggerated respect for whatever they said or did, had characterized her almost since childhood. Because she was big-boned, her shoulders quite wide for a woman, people expected her to be ungainly, but in fact she was graceful; she had the effortless grace of the natural athlete. Her feet were rather large. Her hands were large, also, but she filed her nails carefully and even polished them, and wore a number of rings which she changed from day to day, except for her wedding ring. *How pretty Moira is!* people

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sometimes said, as if surprised. Seeing her at close range, they were often surprised. *How pretty your wife is!* people had told her husband, meaning to flatter him.

He liked her with her hair tied up behind. Or in blouses with frilly, fussy collars and cuffs. Or in those outfits she had pieced together, years before, from second-hand shops: crushed velvet skirts, furred vests, shoes with odd heels and straps, felt hats shaped like buckets or shovels. She was taller than her husband, a golden-glowing girl with a daughterly manner, both robust and shy. It had been years since she had played on girls' hockey and basketball teams, yet her husband often alluded to her skill at sports; he complimented her, embarrassed her, as if to explain to her—however obliquely—why she was not maternal and should not take that risk. She told Beatrice about the humiliating visits of the son, her husband's boy, up from New York City for weekends; she had told no one else, had never dared complain because of course people would have told Edgar. Everyone in Manitock was his friend. Everyone was loyal to him. He was respected, admired, possibly because he looked so much older than he was—in his early forties he had lost most of his hair except for a few blond-white strands that floated about his head, like a halo or an aura, and his face was furrowed, the indentations around his mouth both severe and kindly. He looked like a man who has suffered. He looked like a man who fully expects to suffer. His son was totally unlike him, but he seemed to love the boy very much, whenever he remembered him. So Moira had tried to love him too.

"I even practiced basketball shots with him," Moira told Beatrice. Her tone was lightly sardonic. "There was a playground a few blocks away, with a basketball hoop, so we trudged over there and practiced shots while my husband worked. . . . We didn't talk at all. He had nothing to say to me. He wasn't friendly to anyone, he wasn't even boyish. I couldn't remember him now if I met him on the street. He wouldn't know me: he rarely looked at me." The wife, the other Mrs. Greaney, had fattened the boy up, so that at the age of eleven he was thirty pounds overweight, a sullen child who admired athletes and hunters. He had no interest in his father's work—never looked through the encyclopedias and world books and almanacs his father owned. He confided in Moira only once, begging her to talk his father into buying him an air-rifle. He wanted to hunt in the field behind his father's house, a hilly area

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that was partly wooded, where starlings and grackles and cardinals and bluejays and occasionally even pheasants might be found. He carried around with him, folded many times, full-color advertisements from *Boy's Life* which he showed Moira, displays of handsome air-rifles. He could not have a gun in the city, could not hunt or kill in the city. His eyes glistened, with pain or desire, as he spoke to Moira. She had told him it was hopeless. If she even brought the subject up to his father, which she would not, his father would be angry at them both: it was hopeless. So he had turned away from her and had not seemed to like her much, after that.

"I didn't hate him," Moira said. "I have never hated anyone. . . . I felt him hating me, but I didn't hate him. Instead I forgot him. After the funeral, I forgot him. I'm forgetting everything. Sometimes I think . . . I halfway think that my husband didn't have any children, that the child he had was *me*. I was his child. I wasn't his daughter, necessarily, but his child. He was twelve years older than I was, he ended his marriage for me, in order to marry me, because I loved him so much. He loved me too. But he realized how much I loved him, how I needed him; so he ended his marriage with that other woman. He. . . ."

"He loved you very much," Beatrice interrupted. "Obviously he loved you very much. My husband would never have married me, he would never even have noticed me, if he had been. . . ."

"No, he did it out of kindness, out of charity," Moira said. "I loved him so much it made him feel guilty. I was only twenty-two. . . . He gave up living in the city, all his friends there and his position at the university, to move up here to Manitock, where everyone admired him but didn't know him . . . and he was contemptuous of nearly everyone here, because of course he couldn't talk to them. But he never accused me, he never blamed me. He was a wonderful man."

Beatrice tried to remember Edgar Greaney: she could recall only one rather large gathering, Greaney in a wing-back chair by a fireplace, surrounded by younger men, and the wife, Moira, sitting with other wives, a woman with ash-blond hair who might have been pretty, even beautiful, had she not smiled so persistently. Greaney was a small man with a dapper, brusque manner; his skin was pitted, perhaps from acne or smallpox, but this did not detract from his good looks. In a way he was ugly, in another way quite charming. Beatrice had disliked him at once—she noted how

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everyone stood at attention around him, stiff and silent, respectful, while he explained something, speaking in a logical, precise way, developing a statement to its inevitable conclusion. Not only would no one dare to interrupt, but the possibility of an interruption was grotesque. Edgar Greaney was the author of a number of books, both introductory and advanced, on the subject of logical positivism . . . he had been brought to Manitock as chairman of the philosophy department. Beatrice had liked the man's certainty, she had liked his slightly British accent, believing him to be a European who had spent some time in England and was now trying, with some success, to speak American English. She had even admired, in a way, his method of bringing an evidently abstract argument to a powerful, emotional conclusion, which surprised his listeners, but she had no interest in meeting him; his crossed leg, his twitching foot, the explosive laughter he seemed to force in others, had annoyed her. *I can see the thoughts rising in your mind,* he had said to someone, playfully. A joke, yet a serious joke.

"I loved him so much," Moira said. "I don't want to forget him."

Beatrice confessed to Moira. She confessed her jealousy, her envy. For months she had seen Moira at a distance, had dreaded her, had been bitterly envious of her. But why? Because Moira had been a widow five months before Beatrice and had always been so healthy, so intelligent about her fate. No one pitied her. No one worried about her. "There was an outfit you wore last summer, yellow trousers and a striped pull-over shirt, like a sailor's shirt, that made me think. . . . Forgive me," Beatrice said, "but it made me think that you couldn't possibly be a widow. Not like me."

"People wanted us to meet, did you know that?" Moira said. "I drove by your house a few times, though it was out of my way, thinking that if you were out in the yard. . . . I must say that everything you wore, even the expression on your face, did seem to indicate that you were a widow. Or an older woman. Like some of the mill-worker's wives or mothers, those older Italian women who like to dress in black. I envied you, that you could disguise yourself like that. Sometimes you seemed almost dowdy, almost ugly, did you know that? You looked so pale, almost greenish-white. You looked sick. But you did it deliberately. That was courageous, really; you went down into the grave with him. I was afraid to do that. I thought I might not return again."

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Beatrice was offended. *Went down into the grave with him.* What was the woman talking about, was she crazy? . . . But Beatrice seemed not to mind, she even laughed. They were having coffee together at Beatrice's, one afternoon, and her hand shook so that coffee spilled into her saucer, but she did not mind.

"Cancer of the throat," Moira said without hesitation. "Didn't you know?"

"I didn't know, not specifically. . . ."

"Yes, it was strange, how at first everyone seemed to know," Moira said, in her amused, sardonic voice, though her expression showed that she blamed no one, "at least all our friends knew. All his friends. He went to Boston for treatment, he came back, and for a while the news seemed to be optimistic; or he lied a little. People were anxious about him. They cornered me, telephoned me when he was at school, wanted to know how he was. But as time passed they no longer asked. There's a moment at the very start of a conversation, when the person you've just met asks how you are, how things are with you, and this moment was almost intolerable—I could see the question in the person's mind, I could see it there almost before he could—"

"How strange," Beatrice said.

"— and I could see also the instant in which the person realized he must not ask that question. So—there was nothing to be asked, no question, except a clumsy substitute. But I pretended to notice nothing, I filled in the gaps in conversations, after all I was an independent, healthy person, not at all sick, I didn't even get a bad cold last spring when everyone was sick with the flu, do you remember?—Yes, it was cancer of the throat. The preliminary months were the worst, in a way, since there was some hope. Afterward, when there was no hope. . . ."

She began to cry. She cried openly, almost irritably, like a child.

". . . people came to visit him in the hospital, but I could tell they dreaded the visits. They were terrified and bored at the same time. Because he couldn't talk. He didn't even seem to be listening. If I was there I had to talk in his place . . . I felt as if my soul were being drained out of me, in all those spurts of conversation, trying to make other people feel halfway at ease. There was one awful visit when an associate of his . . . when . . . the man had come alone, without his wife, and he was so miserable, so naively miserable, he believed he had to stay until visiting hours were over at seven, so he

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was there an hour and a half . . . ashen-faced. . . . He kept staring at me, directing questions to me, and I kept replying and asking him questions, an hour and a half of it, and so pointless. . . ."

Beatrice was moved by the woman's tears. And the sound of her voice, which was no longer well-modulated, but had the unashamed, undignified whine, the ugly unmusical noise, of angry grief. She was panicked, that she might begin to cry as well. And they would be united, involuntarily, by their tears—like young girls, like children, like sisters. She stared at Moira, whose face was contracted almost like an infant's, and was upset, that Moira should allow herself to appear so ugly.

"Don't do that!—Your face, you'll ruin your face," Beatrice cried.

By January, the two of them were so obviously friends, so often seen together in Manitock, that when people invited them to parties and dinners, they always added, as if incidentally, that the other was also being invited. But Beatrice always declined. She was gracious, but she declined. She wanted no part of social life, for years she had hated it without ever comprehending the depth of her hatred, always imagining that it was a particular evening, a particular set of people, that had disappointed her. But no: it was the commotion and strain of social life itself. Especially, she had come to dislike the ritual remarks women made to one another, even in the presence of men—always complimenting one another on their clothes, their hair, their physical appearance. They did not know how insulting such remarks were to her, as if she were to be continually assessed from the outside, as an aesthetic phenomenon; they did not sense how, unconsciously, they were setting one another up for the routine, perfunctory admiration of men, which was always slightly contemptuous. And of course she was frightened of their pity. When someone said that it was good she had a teaching job—teaching was so absorbing, wasn't it—she had replied, angrily, that she no longer had the job. She had quit. And why was it "good," why might anyone imagine it was "good," for her to have something to absorb her?

That time, Moira had interrupted, had gracefully intervened. Like an older sister. She had turned the conversation onto something else, while Beatrice stood, smarting, angry and remorseful at the same time, knowing herself a stranger to all these people. . . . Like an older, wiser, more worldly sister, Moira seemed

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to precede her; she might have made the social events tolerable, but Beatrice thought it better to withdraw. She knew that people were not to blame, that they meant only well, she knew it was selfish of her to dislike them. So she declined invitations. But when the telephone rang, she was no longer worried—most of the time it was Moira.

"People ask about you," Moira reported. "Men ask about you."

Beatrice laughed. "You're lying."

"I'm not lying; I never lie."

"They ask about you, not me. They crowd around you, not me. . . . I have no interest in men."

"Still, they ask about you."

"I don't want to hear it," Beatrice said.

"I've had to decline invitations from certain people," Moira said slowly. ". . . men I knew in the past . . . I mean, men I was very friendly with. . . . Before Edgar's death, I mean."

Beatrice wondered what she meant. But she did not ask: the subject of men sickened her. She was still a young woman, only a few months from her twenty-eighth birthday, but she felt aged, soured by too much experience. She and Wallace had been married only five years.But it seemed much longer—more than half her lifetime. He had drawn her spirit out of her and into him, partly, and then he had been killed, one ordinary afternoon. It was as if her right arm had been yanked off. And now she walked around, her arm gone at the socket, bloodless, a scar healing over it, and people asked her cheerfully about how things were going, wasn't it good to be teaching, shouldn't she get out more, shouldn't she have more interests? Even Moira hinted that she should go out. The two of them could go out together, Moira laughed, so men could approach them both, openly. . . .

"And then what?" Beatrice asked.

"Then we could explain how we don't need them," Moira said.

"It was worse for you, the fact that he died so slowly," Beatrice said.

". . . no, I think it was worse for you. You weren't prepared for it. You had the worst shock."

"But you had to endure him changing. His personality must have changed."

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"Yes, it changed. He changed. The man who died wasn't the same man who began it," Moira said. "So in fact it was easier for me. . . . I mean, people seem to die a while before their actual deaths, their physical deaths. It was the same way with my father. They seem to leave themselves. Do you know what I mean? I don't know if I believe in a soul, a soul detachable from the body, but the personality seems to leave . . . or disappear . . . and someone else is there, left behind. It's very strange. About the third week before he actually died, my husband seemed to leave. He even said goodbye to me. . . . I mean, in a way, in a way I can't explain. . . . You don't understand! I can see that you don't understand and I'm frightening you. I meant only to tell you that I think you had the worst of it, a sudden death. You're very brave."

Beatrice remembered the night she had gone mad. She thought of it that way, as madness. Hearing the voice of a former self, hearing her party voice, her social self, going on and on and on so happily and witlessly about the tragic madness of the world, which could not, of course, have any effect upon an intelligent person. . . . And then the terror, the utter, blank, deathly terror. She had experienced a sensation that was indescribable. There were no words for it, nothing. Yet, stammering her anguish over the phone to Moira, to a stranger whom she believed she disliked, she managed to say it was like the empty silence after the *click!* of an automatic phonograph, when the last record has been played and the machine neatly shuts itself off.

"You haven't gone mad," Moira said gently. "You didn't go mad. It's just the shock of it, of his death. It was so much worse for you because he died instantly."

Beatrice pressed her fingertips against her eyes. No, she could not allow her friend to be so generous. No. They argued late into the night, in voices that grew strident at times; at other times, quite tender. "No, I think it must have been more torturous for you, because he died so slowly. . . ."

Beatrice would never forget, how Moira had come to her house. Three in the morning, awakened by the telephone, able to recognize Beatrice's voice in spite of the hysteria . . . without hesitating she had put on ski pants and a sweater, slid her bare feet into boots, snatched a parka from wherever she had tossed it the day before . . . trudged through the brittle snow to her car . . . drove

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all the way across town, on the desolate, icy streets, to Beatrice. She had even known where Beatrice lived.

Beatrice wept, that anyone should be so generous. She knew that she herself was not that generous. Something had been left out of her soul, perhaps. Again and again she thanked Moira. And she could not resist saying: "Would I have done that much for you? Or for anyone? Of course not."

"Certainly you would," Moira said warmly.

"Then you don't know me," Beatrice said.

"I know you very well!" Moira laughed. "I know you in a way you don't know yourself. . . . Yes, it's possible," she said, seriously, "in fact my husband always claimed to know me in a way I didn't know myself. Because he could sense what I was as a possibility; while I only knew myself from the inside, in terms of what I was."

"Your husband was a genius," Beatrice said. "I always admired him. . . ."

"Yes, everyone admired him," Moira said. ". . . Did you like his voice, his accent?"

"Was he European?"

"Born in Columbus, Ohio," Moira laughed. "His parents were from Warsaw; they were Jews, they escaped just before the war. They lived in New York for a while, they were very poor, evidently, then somehow ended up in Columbus—I don't know the details because Edgar didn't tell me. Of course his name was another name. It wasn't Edgar Greaney. He changed it when he went to England, he was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford . . . so in a way, yes, you could say he was European," Moira said thoughtfully. "Yes. But obliquely. He was always around the corner from where anyone stood . . . and if you turned the corner, he'd duck around another corner."

Beatrice looked away. She hoped that Moira would say nothing further.

". . . at the end, he even spoke in Yiddish," Moira said. "I didn't know what on earth he was saying. I didn't know it was a language—any language—I didn't know the sounds of it. Somehow it came back to him, words and phrases. Names. Prayers. I can't be certain, but I think they were prayers, mixed in with other words. English, Polish, Yiddish, German, even French . . . I sat there by his bedside and experienced these sounds, these various struggling sounds, and I came to know what language adds up to. Then, at the

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very end, he couldn't speak at all. I think he was at peace then; he'd managed to say what he wanted to say, so he was at peace. . . . He was a genius, yes," Moira said dreamily, "but that had nothing to do with his death."

"I don't think we should talk about these things," Beatrice said.

"No," said Moira. "But we will."

They fell into each other's lives as if, all along, they had known about each other. Parallel lives, parallel habits. Both woke early, around dawn, and could not get back to sleep. In the kitchen at seven, making coffee, Beatrice felt no dismay when the telephone rang. If it did not ring by seven-thirty, she went to call Moira.

They shopped together. They had lunch at one of the three or four good restaurants in town—were seen together as late as two-thirty in the afternoon, in the dining room of the Ethan Allen Inn, discussing something that must have been of vital importance to each. Moira with her ash-blond hair, her turtle-neck sweaters, her tweed skirts and leather boots . . . Beatrice small, dark, so unaware of her surroundings that she sometimes raised her voice in an incredulous whine, like a child. They evidently argued a great deal. Then Moira would laugh, husky-voiced, totally at ease. . . . In the ski shop adjacent to Manitock's only department store, a man who had known Wallace Kern fairly well tried to have a conversation with them, but it seemed to him that Beatrice was not even listening and that the Greaney woman, whom he did not know, was simply waiting for him to go away, aggressively gracious, nodding before he even finished what he had to say. Moira was going skiing, evidently; she was trying to talk Beatrice into going along, up into Canada, into the Laurentians. But Beatrice was silent, even a little sullen. "It would be good for her, wouldn't it," Moira said to the man, "to get away from Manitock for a few days . . . ? And nothing could happen. She wouldn't have to ski, even, not even the beginners' slopes, if she didn't want to."

The man agreed. He said, clumsily, that it would be good for Beatrice.

"Why should I want what's good for me?" Beatrice asked him, smiling. "Is that what you want for yourself—only what's good for you?

Yet when Moira had a dinner party, in the big, Victorian-Gothic

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house on Fort Street—built by one of the mill-owners at the turn of the century—Beatrice was not there. Someone asked about her and Moira explained, gravely, that Mrs. Kern wasn't well, that she regretted very much having to miss the party—since she liked the other guests—she enjoyed small parties and serious, intelligent conversations. But she wasn't well.

Moira telephoned her from her bedroom, upstairs, while the party was still going on; she told Beatrice that everyone missed her and was asking about her and, yes, she had to admit that Beatrice was right: these people were too busy, too distracting, they talked loudly and tried to joke, even about matters that were not funny—like the university's financial problems—Beatrice had made the correct decision, to stay away. Even though it was almost rude of her.

"Rude? Why is it rude? Beatrice cried. ". . . Did I hear you right? *Rude?*"

"Isn't it? Deliberately rude?"

They argued for several minutes. Moira was whispering, angrily. She wanted to know what Beatrice was doing—was she in bed? No? Then she wasn't ill; it had been a lie. But Beatrice protested, saying that she had never claimed to be ill. What was going on? When? She had simply refused to come to the party because other people made her nervous, even people she liked; she could not endure their forced cheerfulness. Moira paused, then said that Beatrice's husband had been a very extroverted person, hadn't he?—he had enjoyed parties? Beatrice did not reply; she might have been trying to remember. "I can see him in my mind's eye," Moira said, "he had brown curly hair . . . he was tall . . . he laughed a great deal, didn't he? . . . he liked to drink, didn't he? And . . . and. . . . And his eyes were heavy-lidded, he was handsome, his mouth was . . . he was. . . . You're at home tonight thinking about him, aren't you? Aren't you?"

"He didn't like to drink," Beatrice said. "No more than anyone else. He—"

"He might have been let go at the university, did you know that?" Moira said. "There were rumors. Of course it wouldn't have had to do with his professional competence—but the budget is being cut back— Did you know that? Did he tell you?"

"He told me everything," Beatrice said.

"Did he tell you that?"

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"He kept nothing from me!" Beatrice said.

She hung up.

When Moira telephoned her back, she let the phone ring.

"How many weeks has it been?" Moira asked.

"Weeks? I think in terms of months," Beatrice said, ashamed.

"I think you loved him more than I loved my husband. I get that impression."

"No. No, really. I loved my husband very much, but . . . but I don't think I'm as mature a person as you; I don't think I'm capable of love in the way you are."

They sat together in the dining room of Moira's house; Beatrice had come over for dinner at six and it was now eight-thirty. They were finishing a bottle of wine.

"I envy you," Beatrice said, "because he was so much older than you. He taught you so much. He even taught you how to die. . . . Wally was too young, he left me too young. He was just a boy. It was said about him . . . this is a secret, Moira, I know you won't tell anyone . . . it was said about him that he was immature, in spite of being so intelligent. Yes, I actually saw it, the word *immature*. The chairman of his department called me in one day, meaning to be kind, and was very sweet to me . . . praised Wallace . . . told me how the entire department was grief-stricken, and many students . . . because he was very popular with students, especially underclassmen. And the chairman actually showed me the files he and the Dean kept on Wallace, meaning only to be kind . . . a very sweet, nervous man . . . and though most of the comments on the forms were very good, excellent, I happened to notice that word *immature* down in the left-hand corner of the page." She began to laugh. "He may have tried to cover it with his thumb, I don't know, but in any case I saw it. . . . Isn't that funny?"

Moira seized her wrist, to make her stop. She never allowed Beatrice to laugh in that dry, self-mocking way; she found it intolerable. "But you never betrayed your husband. Did you. You were never unfaithful to him, were you. So you did love him more than I loved my husband, regardless of whether some ignorant sons of bitches labelled him "immature." . . . You were faithful, you were never unfaithful. You're better than I am."

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"I don't want to hear about it," Beatrice said.

"I don't want to talk about it. I won't talk about it," Moira said.

One day in February the telephone rang very early, a few minutes after six in the morning. Moira wanted to know if Beatrice had had disturbing dreams. Beatrice had confided in her, as she had never confided in anyone else, that she sometimes suffered from extraordinarily ugly dreams. "What were they? What did you dream? Maybe you should tell me," Moira said.

"They're degrading. I can't talk about them."

Moira said nothing for several seconds. Then, hurt, she mumbled something about the fact that she slept without dreams: blunt and big and healthy as a horse, she was. A clumsy, ugly creature.

"That's ridiculous," Beatrice said sleepily. "You're not ugly. You're not clumsy."

"Sometimes Edgar said I was clumsy. And my mind . . . my imagination . . . he said it was crude. That's why I don't dream. I would welcome even nightmares, I'd be happy to share your nightmares. That would be better than nothing."

"When were you unfaithful to your husband?" Beatrice asked.

"When he was dying."

"Did you tell him?"

"Tell him! No, of course not. . . . And you were never unfaithful to Wallace?"

"Never."

"And now . . .?"

"What do you mean, *and now?*"

"Are you still faithful to him?"

". . . last night I dreamt that someone was trying to get into bed with me, he'd climbed through the window. . . . I was paralyzed with fear, I was sick with fear, I tried to scream because I knew I was sleeping and I had to wake up, I had to escape. . . ."

For a moment Moira was silent. Then she said, uneasily, "I thought that was happening. I don't dream but I sensed dreams somewhere, someone else's dreams, very disturbing ones. . . . Did he get into bed with you? What happened?"

Beatrice said something unintelligible.

"Did he? Did he return to you, did he get into bed with you?" Moira said.

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The Manitock Mill
Manitock, New Hampshire

This 3-storey gristmill was built by Dawson Cody and Robertson Wesley Turner and began operation in 1854. Restored in 1956, the mill is open to the public. One set of original millstones still exist and the six turbines are still in operation.

The inauguration of the mill in 1854 was marred by a tragic accident. The bride of the co-owner, R. W. Turner, was accidentally killed in the machinery.

Beatrice read the plaque and immediately turned away. She did not approve of the prose style. She was alone, out for a long walk, the mill was not open this late in the afternoon, she had no interest in seeing it or in anything else. Moira was not with her. But she was talking to Moira, under her breath, muttering. "Loathsome. Disgusting. . . . No one of them will ever . . . not with me, not again. Never. No man. . . . No one."

". . . he did something terrible once. Terrible. You won't tell anyone? . . . We had seen his son off at the airport, and on the way back, at the entrance to the expressway . . . well, there was a girl in a Volkswagen just ahead of him, going rather slowly, because there was so much traffic out on the expressway. And . . . and evidently he was angry about something or just impatient, because he honked his horn a number of times, furiously, and forced the girl out onto the expressway. Because she was just a girl, a frightened girl, and not certain about driving. And a truck rammed her from behind, and . . . and he didn't stop but just pulled out around the wreck and sped home . . . he forbade me ever to speak of it. He was upset, yes, and guilty and remorseful, and sick about what he had done . . . but he forbade me ever to speak of it."

". . . but you loved him?"

"Didn't you? . . . love *your* husband?"

Beatrice felt illness coming upon her, as if from a distance: the way light sometimes moved swiftly across the colorless late-winter foothills, patches of inexplicable sunlight that appeared and disappeared. Its exact route could not be determined but it moved with a strange blithe certainty. She could feel sickness in her throat, at other times in her stomach; at other times her head ached. She lay in bed, propped up with pillows. She read books of a kind one

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reads in bed, ill, and yet not really ill. She read poetry and did not know—were such lines exquisitely beautiful, or terrifying?

> Such consciousnesses seemed but accidents,
> Relapses from the one interior life
> In which all beings live with god, themselves
> Are god, existing in the mighty whole
> As indistinguishable as the cloudless east
> Is from the cloudless west, when all
> The hemisphere is one cerulean blue.

"I nursed my husband. I took care of him for months. At first I dreaded it . . . then for a while I came to almost like it, to feel fulfilled by nursing him . . . then I dreaded it again. But what do these emotions matter? We do what we do. . . . He died; but you're not going to."

"You're so generous," Beatrice whispered. ". . . coming over here, fixing meals for me. . . . You must be neglecting your own life."

Moira gazed down at herself, smiling. She took in the length of her body: that day she was wearing a loose-fitting cable-stitched ski sweater and faded blue jeans. So tall, so sure of herself!—Beatrice had never seen anyone so vividly. Moira gazed down at the length of her own body and said, "This is my life, right here. We inhabit our own lives constantly."

". . . he did like parties, yes, and he liked to drink. He couldn't seem to control it. The color of his skin actually changed, it got pink, rosy, flushed . . . and he would start to laugh over nothing . . . he liked to be happy, he liked to laugh. It was a mistake for him to come here, to this place; it wasn't right for him. . . . The accident wasn't his fault, but I was told he had been drinking; he had a bottle in the glove compartment and it flew out and was smashed and the smell of it was everywhere . . . so I believed, I tried to believe, that it was just that, the smell of liquor, they were going by. I've never told anyone. . . . He was hardly more than a boy, really. He wasn't an adult. You would have liked him so much, he could make anyone laugh once he got going. He could even make me laugh. . . . But most of the time I don't see anything amusing in the world."

"There isn't anything amusing in the world. It's in your head."

". . . I mean the world in itself," Beatrice said uncertainly.

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". . . in your head. The world is. The world," Moira said, as if imitating someone else, ". . . is in your head. The world is your idea."

"But I can't alter it."

"Why not?"

"Don't frighten me," Beatrice said. "It must be the pills, but I can't seem to understand you."

"We understand everything," Moira said. She had brought Beatrice some soup and tea, on a tray; she squatted at the bedside. Her hair had been brushed carelessly and sprang out in all directions. "We know and foresee and remember, simultaneously."

Beatrice shuddered.

"The past is gone, but the future is gone too—it's inaccessible. It's completed and inaccessible. Today is February 27; we can talk about the past and the future, today, we can talk about our dead husbands or we could talk about ourselves, we could make plans for leaving this part of the world together . . . or even singly . . . escaping together; or singly. But it doesn't matter because everything has already happened. That's why you feel like a corpse: in a sense you're already dead."

"I don't feel dead," Beatrice said.

"Nobody ever does," Moira laughed.

"I don't know what you mean," Beatrice said.

"Would you get married again?"

"And have him die again?"

"But they have to die! It's what must happen."

"It won't happen again," Beatrice whispered.

Moira's eyes were blue, that cerulean blue. But the whites were yellowish, from her cheerfulness. She told Beatrice that it did not matter in the slightest, she would not hold it against Beatrice, that Edgar had not seemed attractive to her. "He was a bastard. He would have hurt you," Moira said.

"I did admire him. . . ."

"He hadn't time for women, really. I don't know why he fell in love with me. It would have upset me terribly, if that man had taken advantage of you. . . . No, he wasn't right for you. He may have appeared to be a genius, but . . . he wasn't quite human, he'd

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forget about his own son for weeks at a time. No, you were right to avoid him."

". . . I was afraid of him," Beatrice said.

"Yes, and you should have been. He would have hurt you. You're not as tough as I am. . . . I am tough, I'm strong. Don't underestimate me. He always underestimated me because he didn't know how to value women. . . . You were afraid of him, then? But you admired him?"

"Yes. Yes."

"But nothing came of it."

"Nothing came of it. . . ."

"You didn't ever see him, in private?"

"No."

"So nothing came of it. . . . And now he's dead. I should sell the house: it's my property. This house is rented, isn't it? We could move back to Boston. We could move all the way out to San Francisco. Would you like that? When you're well again?"

"I'm not sick," Beatrice said. "It's just a cold."

"People think you're ill, they say the most absurd things about you," Moira said. "They do nothing but gossip. We have to leave, don't we? Either together or each of us singly. . . . I'll have to leave him there, in the cemetery. I'll have to leave everyone and so will you. . . . No, you're not sick; you look a little pale and you've lost weight, but there's nothing wrong with you."

"I'm afraid to leave," Beatrice said.

"Do you still dream about him?"

"Yes. No. I dream about many things."

"What did you dream last night?"

Beatrice shook her head, as if not wanting to remember.

"Was he trying to get back to you, trying to . . .?"

"No," Beatrice said. "It was someone else. I think it was you . . . but then it was a stranger . . . it was you, Moira, but also someone else, a stranger. You were pushing me out somewhere, out onto a highway. It was so noisy, the traffic and horns and people screaming and . . . and I was terrified. . . ."

Moira seized her wrist and shook it. "What do you mean?"

". . . I don't mean anything," Beatrice said. "The dream doesn't mean anything. . . . But it was so vivid."

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"It was only a dream, it doesn't mean anything," Moira laughed. "In fact, I forbid it to mean anything."

"I don't want to go to Boston," Beatrice said. "Or to San Francisco either. I'm afraid. . . ."

"I can forbid that too," Moira said.

"Who was your lover, here in Manitock?"

"It isn't important. It doesn't matter. I never see him."

"Who was he?"

It was late March now: they had hiked out to the cemetery. The earth was moist, the wind chilly and fragrant; miles away, in the mountains, sunlight and shadow moved restlessly together, apart, together. Beatrice was frightened of the cemetery, but she had come out anyway. She dreaded the little marker—*Kern*—and there was something about the *Greaney* stone, that highly-polished black rock, that made her uneasy. Yet she had walked the two miles just the same. And now she felt invigorated.

". . . people came to visit him at the hospital . . ." Moira was saying, slowly. ". . . especially on Sundays . . . and . . . and it was such a horror for them, and so boring, that. . . . Well, a friend of Edgar's came one day without his wife; and I felt so sorry for him because he was miserable. . . . In the elevator going down, I started to cry and he. . . . So it happened. But it isn't important."

"And he what?"

"He comforted me. I comforted him too, in a way, because he was frightened of what was happening to my husband, and . . . and so it happened. But it isn't important. It has no meaning."

"You saw the man again, though?"

"A few times."

Beatrice looked at Moira, wonderingly.

"I didn't know what I was doing, exactly," Moira said. "I was very upset and so was he and. . . . But it's over now. I never see him, now."

"He was married, your lover? Who was he?"

"It isn't important."

"Was he . . . my husband?" Beatrice asked.

Her eyes filled suddenly with tears. She had been angry all along, without knowing it; and now her body pulsed with excitement. Moira stared at her, utterly amazed. There were faint lines on her forehead, her skin looked bleached-out, the ash-blond hair was

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coarse as a horse's mane . . . yet she was an attractive woman, certainly; Wallace would have been drawn to her. Beatrice tried to smile.

"Your husband?" Moira whispered.

"Was it? You can tell me. You can admit it."

"Beatrice, are you joking?"

"Was it—?"

"Of course not."

"But why do you look so guilty?"

". . . I didn't even know your husband, Beatrice. Edgar didn't know him. The four of us weren't friends, were we, we didn't know one another, did we . . . ? It was someone else, someone you don't know. It doesn't matter."

Beatrice was trembling. "But I can see the two of you together, you and my husband. I can see you. Yes, it's like something I've already dreamt, something that has already happened. . . . Were you happy with your lover, while your husband was dying?"

Moira turned away.

"Weren't you happy, at least occasionally?"

"No."

"Moira—"

"Frankly, no!"

"Why don't you say *yes?*" Beatrice said.

Moira looked at her, frowning. Then she laughed. "All right. *Yes.*"

"So you were happy, betraying your husband?"

"If you insist."

"And it was my husband . . . ?"

"Beatrice, please, please. You're frightening me. You look so strange . . . you're not going to be sick again, are you? Of course it wasn't—"

"He was going to die anyway, in a few months. But he didn't know it. Why shouldn't he have loved you? Why shouldn't the two of you have been happy? . . . He liked life, he liked laughter, I wasn't right for him. Obviously he fell in love with you and I don't blame him."

She was shouting. Moira backed away from her.

"Beatrice, please—The man was someone you don't even know—and it didn't matter, we didn't love each other—"

"No," Beatrice said.

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"It was—"

"No!" She shut her eyes and pressed her hands against them. The wind must have drawn tears out of her; her face was wet. "Don't you lie to me, don't you deny it . . . don't you deny him . . . he was going to die anyway and why would it have mattered? . . . I don't mind. I don't mind."

After a while she joined Moira, who was waiting for her down on the road. She was still trembling. *Dont't you deny it . . . don't you resist. . . .* She could see that Moira's expression had changed: the guilt was gone, the frown-lines gone. Her eyes too were reddened. But they walked back to town in silence. It was a wild, windy day; the air was sunny and wet at the same time.

Eventually, both women moved out of Manitock. Beatrice got a position in the public schools system in Albany, New York, involving part-time teaching in junior high, and enrolled in a graduate program in art history at the state university there. Moira, after selling her house and most of her belongings, moved to San Francisco. Beatrice sent her a note on an impulse one day: *Thank you, Moira.* Weeks went by without any answer; Beatrice had nearly forgotten about it, when she received a reply on a blank sheet of paper. *You're welcome, Beatrice.* And that was all.

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ANTHONY HECHT

Somebody's Life

I

Cliff-high, sunlit, in the tawny warmth of youth,
He gazed down at the breakneck rocks below,
Entranced by the water's loose attacks of jade,
The sousing waves, the interminable, blind
Fury of scattered opals, flung tiaras,
Full, hoisted, momentary chandeliers.
He spent most of the morning there alone.
He smoked, recalled some lines of poetry,
Felt himself claimed by such rash opulence:
These were the lofty figures of his soul.
What was it moved him in all that swash and polish?
Against an imperial sky of lupine blue,
Suspended, as it seemed to him, forever,
Blazed a sun-flooded gem of the first water.

II

Blazed, as it seemed, forever. Was this the secret
Gaudery of self-love, or a blood-bidden,
Involuntary homage to the world?
As it happens, he was doomed never to know.
At times in darkened rooms he thought he heard
The soft ruckus of patiently torn paper,
The sea's own noise, the elderly slop and suck
Of hopeless glottals. Once, in a bad dream,
He saw himself stranded on the wet flats,
As limp as kelp, among putrescent crabs.
But to the very finish he remembered
The flash and force, the crests, the heraldry,
Those casual epergnes towering up
Like Easter trinkets of the tzarevitch.

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ELIZABETH KNIES

Possessions

I have
A plain desk in a room
Where sunlight penetrates
The long afternoon.
Afternoons of waiting.
The sea through the trees
Is wet and separate.
It will not dry.
It is not a painting.
This is the real:
The quality of light, the passage
Of birds, the patience of vows.

Some Signs

The kingfisher on the wire is intellectual
And blue as a chord.
He takes in that scene, light and arrested
While the moon fills with words

And the cattails, feathered, move off
Slowly into the night.
The brown rabbit's tail is a powderpuff
Just as in stories! Could that be right?

On stilts the heron wades and fishes,
At midnight the doe freezes before the car,
Queen Anne's lace and jewelweed in the saltmarshes
Rise like stars.

Gallant, you are walking on waterfalls
In the exhaled air where you have gone to forget.
Now that the fields are mown, the little foxes
Peer curiously out, small as pets.

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Absence

You have withdrawn,
Receded into memory once again.
What was your presence I put away
Like a carefully folded letter.

You stepped out of me
As out of a room, but the door is ajar;
Through it I see the days ahead open
Like a path to a sepulchre.

No More

There will be no more surprises.
The pain increases
Like water in a well
Serene, unshatterable
Until day draws another bucket up.

Stones stand stock still.
They make fences, rings and pathways.
They cannot be expected to console.

Fallen Among Thieves

It was at great expense, great personal expense
That I knew you.
I did not mark the cost
And now I am surprised to be bereft so,
Left with nothing.
Like one who went among thieves
But did not know they were taking anything from him,
That is how I was with you.
You did not even deceive me.

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RICHARD PEVEAR

Three Poems

I

Baked like a shepherd's pie, full of flowers
The watery green meadow against the black green
Of the pine woods, the ocherous shade
And two horses grazing—
Wild mustard, marsh grass, fallen apples,
Their taut bellies all breath, emptiness—
Above them a flight
Of fish crows, embers of the house
That burned last winter against the sky,
And I can no longer
Find a place for my memory
Of the woman who lived there alone, reduced
To ashes in the cellar-oven. Fruit sometimes
Ripens too quickly in the fire.
And nothing is gathered in.
And that is a sign. But what more
Can ever be said? On islands
In the northern ocean, not only
On islands but on the northernmost
Tips of the islands, on the sea-cliffs
Walled off to the south, turning away from
That human story, the bedesmen
Built their waiting houses—
Grass-filled, gathering
Richness in the ground, their strung stones
Told over and over on the lips
Of the island horses. Not lost
But as if asleep, the horses
Move into an almost classical distance,
Into August, into the rift, the calm eye
Of the unreaped meadow. But to abide
Is to be forever expectant.

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2

White days of March, so much is lost,
So much is withheld.
The sky is blank, suspended, the sea-mist
Questions the presence of trees,
Their dark indifference to the weather,
Wave after wave blowing through the branches.
Of days of thaw and days of freezing,
The ridged and rutted
Memory of too many pointless acts,
The road has forgotten everything it knew.
Spring has come like Schliemann
Who broke into the treasury of the Mycenaeans
Looking for gold and splashed around
Knee-deep in the wet clay of layer upon layer
Of tablets, the bank-book of the deadly kings.

3

Sunrise, an open window.
The curtains are blown aside.
The trees hung up for winter
Against the wall of the sky
Shake out at the surprise
Of warm air. In the scaffolding
Bits of drab green, goldfinches,
Carpenters of this morning.

Carpenters building
A summer house on the rocks
By the edge of the water, return
To work, abstractly. The sea is quiet.
The men are drunk with possession,
The turpentine of fresh wood.

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GILBERTO PEREZ

All in the Foreground

A Study of Dovzhenko's *Earth*

—For Claudia

WHEN WE WATCH SILENT FILMS TODAY, most of them give us the feeling that they are working under an unnatural restriction, like a deaf-mute who must communicate by other means what is normally expressed through speech. We are now used to sound, of course, but I don't think this quite accounts for the way we miss it in silent films. We don't get the same sense of a lack when we watch films in black and white, even though by now we are also used to color. The movies are supposed to be predominantly a visual medium, but they seem to require sound much more than they require color. Seeing people move on the screen, we want to hear them talk; seeing them react to one another, we want to hear what they say to one another; it is hard for us to accept the convention of their silence. The movies are not only a visual but also naturally a dramatic medium where we see enacted the interaction between human beings, a peculiar affair when it is conducted without their being able to speak. Most of the acting we encounter in silent films strikes us today as very strange, with the actors resorting to a kind of sign language which is no real substitute for spoken language. Physical comedy seems to be the one dramatic mode that could thrive within the limitations of the silent screen: the films of Chaplin and Buster Keaton remain fresh today like few others of that period. The comedians seem at home in silence like none of the mute performers of serious drama, maybe because a long tradition of silent clowns existed before them on the stage; but also, one might argue, because the necessary unreality of silent acting is better suited to the artificiality of a comic mode.

Can't all the visual means of cinema, all the techniques of camera and cutting, make up for the acting, take the place of the spoken word as dramatic means? Visual patterns, with images which reproduce the concrete presence and motion of people, are not an

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adequate equivalent for dramatic patterns acted out by the people we see reproduced on the screen. In Carl Dreyer's famous silent film, *The Passion of Joan of Arc,* human faces are photographed in close-ups of great intensity, but dramatic conflict between the possessors of those faces is scarce in this version of Joan's trial: she remains monotonously passive and suffering before her accusers, with little of the mutual give and take which would produce dramatic movement. Visual conflict Dreyer abundantly provides, by such strategies as his cutting between huge, long-held close-ups of Joan and briefer, often mobile shots of her judges, and it is through such visual patterns, developed like the patterns in a piece of music—"a fugue of faces," this film has been called—that he attempts to generate movement; but his film remains static and monotonous like the dramatic situation it depicts. Where we expect a dramatic interaction, a visual interaction will not do in its place; as Robert Warshow argued in reference to another film by Dreyer, the demands of drama cannot be satisfied by purely visual means.

A film, unless it is made up of abstract shapes, is not a mere arrangement of images; it is also an arrangement of the concrete reality that the images reproduce, and must be given a form in accordance with the demands of that reality. A purely visual organization, the form of moving wallpaper, will not do; but a dramatic organization isn't always what is required either. It would have been for Dreyer's *Joan;* but not for *Nanook of the North,* for example, which deals with the interaction between man and nature, not with the interaction between dramatic characters. The main problem to be solved, in films not dealing with a dramatic situation, is that of devising a formal alternative to the dramatic plot, another kind of structure adequate to the demands of the concrete image, and able to give the film its movement and its unity. Solving this problem was not beyond the means of silent cinema: as alive today as the comedies are some silent films which manage an undramatic form. *Nanook* is the quintessential documentary, operating through our simple curiosity about the world: its structure is a process of discovery, our finding out more and more about how an Eskimo lives. *Un Chien Andalou* is the surrealist dream-film, where charged physical images like the famous slicing of the eye come before us abruptly, one succeeding another without any rational connection between them, in a structure based on their sensual association.

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Nosferatu is a vampire movie which works somewhat like the Eskimo documentary, by having us look at an actual world curious to discover what is there—except that in *Nosferatu* what is actually in the world affects us less than what we fear might be there. The structure of *Nosferatu* is based on the subjective experience of looking at the world uncertain before what we see, a world that appears indelibly strange before the anxious gaze of Murnau's camera.

Some Soviet films of the 1920's are undramatic, unconcerned with character, because they altogether disdain the subjective, very much in the spirit of confident Communism, of Marx and the machine, of that decade after the revolution in Russia. People are not individuals in Eisenstein's films but members of a crowd, emblems of a class, representatives of historical forces. The camera does not look at the world like a human eye in Dziga Vertov's documentaries, but flaunts its status as a mechanical eye; *The Man with the Movie Camera* is about the city as a machine recorded by the machine which is the camera. Pudovkin's films attend more to the individual, but they are also less successful, bound up as they become with the problems of silent drama which are avoided by Vertov and Eisenstein. The structure of Vertov's films, their aggregate space pieced together in the cutting room out of diverse materials gathered by a seemingly omnipresent camera, suggests the constructions of the engineer so prized in that Soviet society. Eisenstein's films are more like the intellectual constructions of the dialectician; his form of cutting, what he called montage, juxtaposes different things to arrive at a conceptual synthesis, making a kind of argument out of a sequence of shots. One may find inhuman the machine vision of Vertov, or the intellectualization of Eisenstein, the way he turns people into abstractions; one may dislike their schematic art, their imposed arrangements of the cutting room. But one cannot doubt the aesthetic adequacy of some of their films; certainly one cannot say that what they did has been done better by anyone else since the coming of sound.

The Ukrainian director Alexander Dovzhenko was part of the same movement and owed much to what they did. His films are undramatic for much the same reason that theirs are, because he does not allow the individual to take precedence over the larger pattern, the collective endeavor; like them he was committed to Marxism and to an art of unyielding objectivity. But there is nothing

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schematic or inhuman in the robust art of this rooted Ukrainian, the son of peasants, who made films about his land and his people. He was neither a dialectician nor an engineer, dealing in abstractions or inanimate objects; he was a poet, one of the most sensual of film-makers, whose images are rich with life. Facing a man and a machine he more often than not frames the man and leaves out the machine: a larger system transcends the man but the man himself is to be acknowledged. With Dovzhenko objectivity is not to be gained through the calculated exclusion of the personal. What can be more personal than death? Yet deaths in Eisenstein are robbed of their personal dimension, summarily assigned their place in the progress of history. Dovzhenko too sees deaths as taking their place in a larger order; but even when, at the beginning of *Earth,* an old peasant dies in the fields amidst the generations of his family and the fruits of the land, in peaceful harmony with the cycles of nature, there is at the same time a sense of the man's death in its awesome, inviolable privacy. The numerous deaths in Dovzhenko's films are depicted in extraordinary passages of sorrowful majesty.

Earth (1930) was among the last Soviet silent films, and to my mind it is their peak, a tractor movie which Dovzhenko makes into a great film poem. It did not please the commissars, who found it insufficiently militant—they wanted a pamphlet not a poem—and had portions of it cut. It did not please Eisenstein, who found it insufficiently formalized, too concrete where it should have been more symbolic. *Earth* was too many-sided and ambiguous for Eisenstein as for the commissars, its affirmations too qualified by a recognition of human weakness, its generalizations too complicated by an attention to particular experience. In *The General Line,* Eisenstein's own movie about the collectivization of agriculture, the tractor is just a symbol of progress, the New in contrast with the Old, whereas in *Earth* we are also made aware of what the tractor means to different people whose lives are being affected by the changes it brings about. *The General Line* culminates in the abstraction of a vast ballet of tractors which reminds one uncomfortably of a Busby Berkeley number; in *Earth* it is Dreyer who is brought to mind by the weighty close-ups of human faces. But these close-ups, unlike Dreyer's, are not used to concentrate our attention on a few individuals, the main characters in a dramatic situation: rather they take in, at one point or another, virtually everyone in the

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Ukrainian village which is the setting of *Earth*. *Earth* is undramatic not because it is unconcerned with individuals but because it is concerned with many individuals, all brought to the foreground, all, we are made to feel, equally deserving of attention.

Dramatic movement is generated by the interaction between a few characters to whom any others must be kept subordinate. The movement of *Earth* is managed in a different way, through a structure which can accommodate a greater breadth of attention than is possible in drama. It is a structure based on the interaction between the particular and the general, between what each person is in himself and what he has in common with others, the place he has in a larger system that overrides and contains everyone. The movement of *Earth* is in the assimilation, the synthesis, of the diverse claims of individuality into an objective order in the world.

*

Earth begins with several shots of wheat fields in the wind. We see nothing but the sky and the wheat; the fields are like a wind-stirred ocean. Then the film cuts to a close-up of a young woman standing, motionless, next to a huge sunflower swaying in the wind. The woman's immobility comes across as the opposite of passivity: it is a resistance to being swayed, an assertion of her intrinsic energy, her own intensity, before the surrounding energies and intensities of nature.

In the next shot the swaying sunflower fills the whole screen: it, too, has its own intensity. And so have the fruit on the trees, the apples and pears which we see next—which we seem almost to reach out and grasp—in an unhurried succession of close-ups. Each cluster of fruit, each apple or pear singled out by Dovzhenko's camera, is seen, dwelt on, in isolation from the others around it, as an object of attention complete in itself. We have little sense, as we watch each shot, of what lies in the neighboring space. It is the same with the shots of people in the sequence that follows. Even though the people we see are all gathered in one area, around a dying old peasant who lies on the ground, they are nevertheless shown one at a time, each isolated from the rest, with no establishing shots of the whole group, no clear sense conveyed of where they stand with respect to one another. They are all nearly immobile in their places, and each one, photographed frontally, holds the screen by himself: each one has his own intensity.

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Earth is a film of big spaces, expanses of land seemingly without limit. We get extreme long shots where everything looks tiny beneath a huge sky that takes up most of the screen. Yet individual things hold their own against the vastness of the sky and the land. They are not merely glimpsed, they are virtually gripped when the camera comes close, passionately apprehended in their individual fullness and solidity. They are taken out of their spatial context by Dovzhenko's close-ups; what they are in themselves matters more than where they are exactly within that vast space. Space is fragmented: there is little feeling of spatial continuity from shot to shot. Even when the camera moves—which happens rarely—it is always to dwell on an object, follow it closely, rather than to explore the surrounding space. Of course spatial fragmentation is characteristic not only of *Earth* but of Soviet silent films generally. Showing a scene as a continuous whole was inadmissible to Eisenstein: the scene had to be broken down into discrete fragments, close-ups mostly, which could then be arranged afresh into a montage pattern. But for Eisenstein fragmentation was a means of subjugating reality, making the material less resistant to his manipulation; whereas Dovzhenko's close-ups serve to enhance, not diminish, the intrinsic reality of the things he shows us, the sense of their independent life.

In the essay on "Odysseus' Scar" which opens *Mimesis,* Erich Auerbach described the style of narration in the Homeric poems as being "of the foreground." "Homer knows no background," Auerbach wrote. "What he narrates is for the time being the only present, and fills both the stage and the reader's mind completely." The story of Odysseus' scar, when it comes up in the *Odyssey,* is the story of something that happened in the past, an interruption of what is happening in the main narrative, but it takes over our attention completely—it becomes "the only present"—while it is being told. I would argue that with Dovzhenko we get a kind of equivalent, in the film medium, of this Homeric procedure. Dovzhenko's style may also be said to be "of the foreground." Literally he often puts things in the foreground—he uses a lot of close-ups. But what is crucial is the way in which what he shows us at any given moment commands our complete attention: while we watch it we have little awareness of anything else. In the work of no other director is there such exclusion from our minds of everything

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not being shown, such concentration on what each image contains. Another director may show us a close-up of an apple, but generally this will be done, say, because one of the characters wants the apple to eat, or from some other perspective that takes us outside the apple itself. With Dovzhenko the apple is the only present, the object of our complete attention while it is there on the screen. When Eisenstein, in a celebrated shot from *Potemkin,* shows us a close-up of the ship doctor's pince-nez dangling from a rope, this is meant to refer to something outside the pince-nez itself, to the doctor's death off-screen, thrown overboard by the mutinous sailors. With Dovzhenko all that counts, at a given moment, is what is there, clearly displayed on the screen. The dying old peasant sits up on the ground and bites into a last pear, in sensual enjoyment of the fruits of a world he is soon to depart from: that image in front of us absorbs us totally, its richness and resonance all in the foreground, all in what we see.

As the story of Odysseus' scar is not mere background information, subordinate to the main narrative of the *Odyssey,* but something with a full importance of its own, so in *Earth* the apples and the wheat are not a mere backdrop for the action, and the people of the Ukrainian village are not subordinate to a few main characters: everything that is shown assumes a full importance of its own. This is foreign to the dramatic procedure of assigning importance to things only as they have bearing on the main action. We find in Auerbach that Goethe and Schiller contrasted the Homeric mode of narrative—the epic mode—with the dramatic mode of the tragic poets. To put all in the foreground, make everything fully present, seems indeed an essentially undramatic procedure. In Homer, Auerbach argued—and I would argue that all this applies, *mutatis mutandis,* to Dovzhenko—we get a fully externalized description of things, a uniform illumination on them that leaves nothing dark or incomplete, no room for their taking on a subjective significance; what is being narrated takes place in an absolute present, where things are simply themselves, seen without perspective. Drama requires perspective; it requires that things be seen to some extent as they appear to the characters; that they be seen, at any rate, as they appear in the perspective of the plot, with the present placed in relation to what has happened in the past and to what we anticipate may happen in the future; dramatic tension

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can be generated only if we keep something else in mind beyond what, at the time being, is objectively there. This is not the case when we read Homer, and not when we watch a film by Dovzhenko.

I have been suggesting that Dovzhenko's concentration on each of his images, the fullness and uniform clarity of his apprehension of things, has much in common with the "foreground" style of narration found in the Homeric poems. In Dovzhenko, however, the "foreground" style lends itself little to narration; the narrative in *Earth* is slight and even so it is at times difficult to follow. Homer's foreground can accommodate in full detail a whole scene that he is describing, Dovzhenko's only what can be shown clearly in each image on the screen. Dovzhenko proceeds image by image; his style depends on a spatial fragmentation which has no equivalent in Homer and which tends to impede narrative flow. This brings us back to the question of how, lacking dramatic impetus and lacking also the flow of narrative, *Earth* achieves its movement.

*

Writing about the Russian movies in a provocative essay which challenged many of the old assumptions, Robert Warshow maintained that

> . . . Dovzhenko's virtues are all connected with a certain passivity. He is most successful in presenting the life of the peasants when he is willing to accept it as something irremediably "given" and devote himself to recording its meaningful appearances. . . . Whenever he assumes a more active posture . . . his work takes on as glassy and inhuman a brilliance as Eisenstein's.

I don't think "passivity" is the right word to apply to Dovzhenko's respect for the independent reality of his material; a passive recording of appearances would not convey the ardent sense we get in his films of the energies of being, the intrinsic force of things as they are. Nor is there in him, as Warshow asserted, a sentimental, "willfully excessive surrender" to things as they are; rather there is a will to order, not an order imposed on the material, but discovered in it, and brought out by his technique.

Dovzhenko is perhaps less concerned than any other film-maker with momentary appearances, incidental particularities that the

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camera happens to record. He seeks to photograph the essential shape of things, to reveal concrete objects in their enduring aspect. His images seldom give us the elusive impression, the passing glimpse, the oblique view; things, squarely confronted, show us their full face, so to speak, and are held long enough on the screen for our eyes to go beyond the mere appearance and get a grasp of the substance. In not a few of his shots people stand almost immobile, statuesque, suggesting the permanence and solidity—but not the inanimateness—of stone. Their stillness is not that of a moment arrested, a gesture frozen, as in a stopped frame; rather it is the stillness of an attitude that intrinsically endures, sustained by living energy as time visibly passes, the embodiment, we feel, of an essential state of their being. Like the painters of the Renaissance, Dovzhenko emphasizes not how things look from a certain viewpoint, under a certain light, submerged in a *mise en scène*, but what Berenson called "the corporeal significance of objects." His images strongly engage our tactile sense; like those of Renaissance art they vividly render the fullness and self-sufficiency, the rounded steadfastness of solid forms. The settled, stable quality of his images (one can conceive of many of them going on indefinitely) contrasts with the restlessness we find in Eisenstein or Murnau, film-makers who, for all their differences, both have a quality of the Baroque. Something Adrian Stokes said about Piero della Francesca could be applied to Dovzhenko: compared with Dovzhenko's images those of all other film-makers are as sea to land.

Piero is a painter whose style could be described as being "of the foreground." His paintings offer a pictorial equivalent of the full externalization, the uniform clarity and objectivity which Auerbach described in the Homeric style. Geometric perspective is not used by Piero to express a subjective perspective, a particular point of view that makes some things stand out and others recede in importance; to everything on the picture plane Piero gives an equal stress. Now the camera automatically reproduces things as they appear from a particular point in space, which automatically tends to give to some things—those closer to the camera, or in sharper focus—a greater stress than it gives to others. And what the camera reproduces, unlike a painting, is usually felt to be incomplete, not all there is to see but only a section of a larger space, so that the camera tends to place an uneven stress on the visual field, to create

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a kind of foreground and background, simply by bringing some things into view, while we are aware that other things around them are left out. A painter like Piero can portray with the same distinctness, the same vividness of color, objects that are close and objects that are well in back, making them all equally present, putting a uniform stress on things in the unified space of the picture. To achieve a similar evenness of stress, a similar effect, as I maintain it to be, of all in the foreground, a film-maker like Dovzhenko must rely on spatial fragmentation. He must show things often one by one, with the equal clarity given by close-ups, in isolation from the context of a larger space which, were we made more aware of it as we watch each shot, would function in the manner of a background for what we see. Stokes wrote that, in a painting by Piero (or in a relief by Agostino di Duccio), "every part is on some equality with every other part." With Dovzhenko one might say that every shot is on some equality with every other shot; what different shots contain is, so to speak, put on the same plane.

Eisenstein, too, counters through spatial fragmentation the uneven stress that the camera tends to give to the things it reproduces; but he does this in order to impose on things another, more violently uneven stress of his own. Each of Dovzhenko's shots is a more or less self-sufficient fragment, balanced within itself, its center of gravity in the rounded, separate entity of the object photographed. Eisenstein respects neither the integrity of space nor that of individual objects, and the bits and pieces of them that he gives us, the unusual aspects that his camera angles press on us, nearly always feel unbalanced, incomplete: Eisenstein's shots demand to be balanced by other shots. The relationship between shots in Eisenstein is generally not one of equality but of contrast. His style is based on contrast, "collision," as he himself put it, the yoking together of things that are often abruptly dissimilar. Dovzhenko, like Piero, prefers to bring out correspondences, connections between things, to juxtapose elements that have an intrinsic similarity. Unlike Eisenstein, Dovzhenko often cuts between similar compositions, different things seen in the same way (as Piero paints different things in the same way). When, at one point in *Earth,* an old farmer and his progressive son are having an argument with their backs turned to each other, we are shown the back of one and then of the other, in separate shots similarly composed, so that the

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two backs look almost the same, suggesting not so much an opposition between father and son as an affinity between them. Dovzhenko's style is based on sameness: a sameness established in discreteness. The space within the frame, a space which he makes us regard, in every shot, as self-contained and complete, becomes with him a kind of constant, a common ground which different things, located in different places, successively occupy. What different things have in common is thus enforced: it is as if they were brought, one after another, into the same space.

Consider the sequence in *Earth* of the coming of the tractor to the Ukrainian village. The people of the village, all assembled waiting for the arrival of this new machine that is going to change the old ways, are photographed for the most part singly or in groups of two or three: an old peasant, distrustful, stands flanked by two oxen; another looks on sceptically; the kulaks, rich landowners who anticipate the loss of their property, strike hostile attitudes, alarmed or derisive; children run to meet the tractor; there are shots of horses and cattle, roused and awaiting like the people; there are many close-ups of young men and women of the village smiling in excited expectation. Each of these persons is seen individually, each one adopting his own stance, isolated from the others by the spatially self-contained shots; yet what they have in common with one another is brought forth by the similar ways in which they are photographed, the more or less equal weight given to the separate shots in which they appear. Each succeeding shot of the people is on some equality with the previous shot, taken from a similar angle—often from below against the sky—or showing them in similar groupings. The rounded presences of people are brought into correspondence by the way they occupy the space within the frame.

What brings the people together on this occasion is of course the tractor they all await, however different their attitudes toward it may be. They are all looking in the same direction, that from which the tractor is to come. But the direction in which they all look, the point in space their faces are all turned toward, is not well defined in shots nor clearly oriented spatially with respect to any point outside the frame. The tractor is out there somewhere, and we get a few shots of it, but Dovzhenko is more engaged with the people who are waiting for it, their different feelings about it and the concern

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with it they all share: they all look expectantly in some direction but we are made to look intently at them. The spatially discontinuous shots are linked together by their inner arrangement, not by their relationship to some object out of frame in a location not specified, and the sense that is conveyed is of people who are brought together not by some external circumstance, but by an inner connection they have with one another, an intrinsic affinity among them. Later on, toward the end of the film, a speaker addressing a crowd of the villagers points up to an airplane flying above them, upon which they, as one, all turn their heads and look up at the sky; what they are looking at doesn't really matter, and the airplane is never shown.

As Warshow speaks of passivity, there are others who, admiringly but not without condescension, speak of the simplicity of Dovzhenko's technique, in contrast with the brilliant complexities of Eisenstein's, as if what made *Earth* superior to *The General Line* were a certain naiveté, a lack of sophistication better suited to dealing with peasant subject matter. It is true that in Eisenstein's film the technique is grossly in excess of the content communicated, whereas in Dovzhenko's there is a satisfying appropriateness of one to the other; but that is an appropriateness to be found in any truly successful work of art, which *Earth* is, and *The General Line* is not. There is nothing of the simple peasant about Dovzhenko's technique. Technically *Earth* is audacious and experimental—Dovzhenko's handling of space is unique in the movies—and it only attests to the expressive achievement of the film that its technique can nevertheless seem transparent. Peasant couples, after a day's work, are posed like statues in the country dusk, each man's hand on the woman's bosom, their total immobility charged with a vibrant sexuality: impossible to confuse such bold stylization with a naive straightforwardness; nor does it give us the sense we often get with Eisenstein of a style artificially imposed, a distortion of the material into unwelcome patterns.

"Whenever he assumes a more active posture . . . his work takes on as glassy and inhuman a brilliance as Eisenstein's." What Warshow refers to as a "more active posture" is the posture of synthesis, the effort by Dovzhenko to fit together distinct individualities, separately apprehended, into a larger pattern where they are all seen to take their place. The way Dovzhenko proceeds

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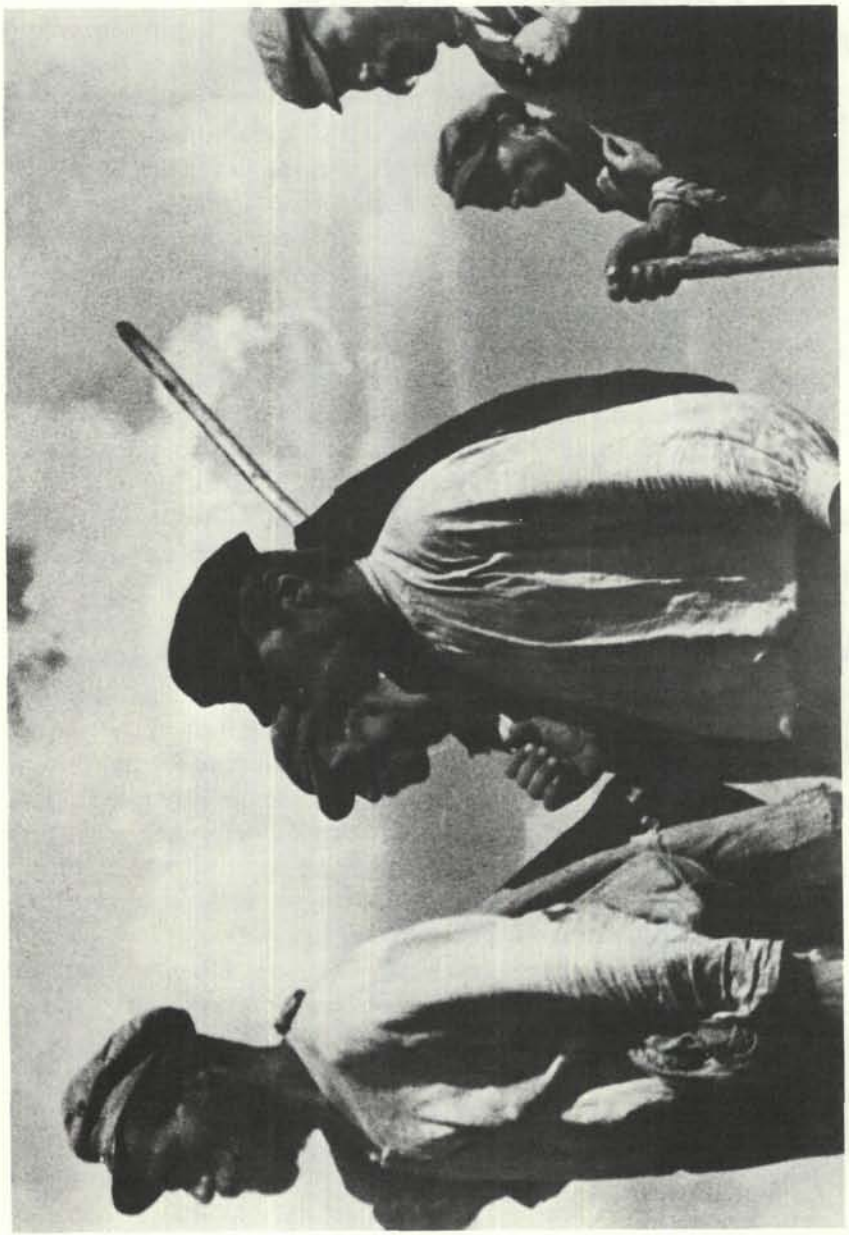

(The Museum of Modern Art Film Stills Archive)

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does remind us of Eisenstein, and certainly was indebted to him: shots which are discrete units are arranged together in the cutting room so that they form a pattern, so that their juxtaposition and concatenation effects a synthesis. But with Eisenstein the shots which are discrete units are not allowed to carry the independent weight they carry with Dovzhenko. With Dovzhenko a synthesis is always hard-won against the inherent recalcitrance of what the shots contain, separate entities which, even as they are arranged into a larger design, yet retain an undiminished life of their own. Because Eisenstein's shots are not so burdened with an independent content, his editing can achieve a dazzling embroidery, a briskness of elaboration which is not available to Dovzhenko, whose editing works intimately against the pressure of concrete things. Warshow disapproves of Dovzhenko's editing patterns as he does of Eisenstein's, temperamentally mistrusting any attempt to go beyond people and objects in themselves. But a striving for a larger order, a system that transcends individuality, is not incompatible with a deep respect for the intrinsic nature of people and objects. Washow wants to draw a line between the two, between what he calls a more active and a more passive posture, but throughout *Earth* the two are combined. Dovzhenko's film combines a respect which is not passive surrender, and does not succumb to sentimentality, with a striving toward pattern which is not authoritarian control, and does not lead to a glassy and inhuman formalization.

In *Earth* each image is an island, an intense apprehension of being, self-contained and essentially static. But Dovzhenko doesn't leave it an island: he struggles to connect and unify. Chiefly by means of the editing, by the way he brings things together in the assembling of the shots, he goes beyond the static apprehension of people and objects in themselves. The very effort to put the separate pieces together is what gives the film its forward movement. It is not the movement of pure pattern, as in a musical composition, but the movement to establish pattern against the weight of concreteness, to incorporate into a larger design the individual energy that things possess.

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Earth is symmetrically divided into two parts, two main movements, each beginning slowly, at a point of stillness, and building up to a culminant synthesis. The first part begins, after the

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prelude of wheat fields and close-ups of fruit, with the sequence of the old peasant's death, and it culminates with the arrival of the tractor and the fast-cut sequence that follows. In this sequence men and tractor, reaper and thresher and women smiling, their legs glimpsed under wind-blown skirts as they bind the sheaves of grain, all join forces in the labors of the land and the wheat, with ploughing and harvesting, threshing and breadmaking, all mixed together by Dovzhenko and compressed into a symbolic day's work. The Old is not so much discarded as assimilated into the rhythm of the New.

The second part of the film begins with the shots of lovers, after the day's labor, standing motionless at dusk. Among them, standing with his fiancée's head against his breast, is Vassily, leader of the young peasants working toward collectivization. (His eyes are closed; hers, however, are wide open and strangely unrestful amidst the stillness of this sequence.) Afterwards, in the night, Vassily, all alone, is on his way home through the village. Around him everything is quiet and appears a little blurred, softly glowing in the country moonlight with the subdued richness of dormant life. Along the dusty road he breaks into a dance, a dance of joy in the day's accomplishment and in a felt kinship with the world, a dance which grows faster, wilder, as he moves forward, until suddenly he drops to the ground, shot dead in the middle of this dance of life. He has been murdered by (as we find out later) a drunken and vindictive young kulak through whose lands he had driven the tractor on that day.

Vassily's father refuses the officiations of the village priest, and decides instead that the body of his son should be buried by the young people of the village with songs about the future and the new way of life that his son died for. In the sequence centered on this funeral the second part of the film reaches its culmination. (This sequence suffers considerably from the cuts made in it by the Soviet censors; perhaps Warshow would have modified his strictures against it had he been able to see the complete version of the film, made available only recently.) Like the coming of the tractor, Vassily's death is an event which claims the attention of everyone in the village, and which, in the diverse responses it evokes, brings out essential attitudes in the people. But it is harder to come to terms with this event, harder to give it a clear meaning. Vassily murdered

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in the prime of life is not something that can be assimilated to the cycles of nature as could the old peasant's death at the beginning of the film; yet the dead young man, in an open coffin, is carried to his grave across the same vast and fruitful fields where the old man died, and the apples on a tree caressingly brush his face as he passes under. Religion is excluded from the burial—the old priest is all alone in his empty church—but not so easily from the minds of the people: an old kulak woman, then an old peasant woman, then Vassily's mother, pregnant with another child she is about to give birth to, all make the sign of the cross as the funeral procession goes by. Vassily's father walks in the procession, yet he doesn't join in the singing of the young people; he remains apart from them in his private grief, and cannot readily be consoled by the invocations of the future. Vassily's fiancée seems utterly inconsolable, all alone in her room with her clothes off, painfully yearning for her dead lover, screaming his name and throwing herself about the room in despair. Seized with remorse, Vassily's murderer, the young kulak, likewise becomes frantic: he runs across the fields to confront the people at the burial and confess to them his guilt, and then, up on a hill amidst graveyard crosses, his lone figure tiny under the immense sky, he performs a mad reenactment of Vassily's dance on the night of the murder. But he fails to get for his confession the attention of the people assembled below: they are all listening to the speech of a young Bolshevik eulogizing Vassily as a hero who gave his life for the new order.

None of the actions depicted in this sequence impinges on the others. The burial and the various responses to it are intertwined in the editing, but each is an action complete in itself, taking place on its own. Among these self-contained pieces, each in turn occupying our full attention, Dovzhenko establishes a coherence which is not that of dramatic interaction. The pieces don't interact: rather they are, one might say, connected from within, by what they intrinsically have in common, pointed up by Dovzhenko's technique, enforced in the juxtapositions of his elaborate intercutting. The vigorous rhythm of the cutting, bringing the separate shots into play together, helps produce a sense of their coherence. But rhythm depends on some degree of contrast, on an alternation of stress forcibly imposed on the individual parts; whereas Dovzhenko, as I have argued, puts different shots in some equalizing relationship

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which respects their individual claims. He never makes so assertive a use of rhythmic cutting as we encounter in Vertov or Eisenstein. Even in the sequence after the tractor arrives, a sequence made to hang together largely by an overriding rhythm of quick cutting, the rhythmic cutting is not an aggressive imposition on material which invites such an arrangement—brisk physical activities, themselves rhythmic, of men and machines diversely engaged in the work of the land. Cutting is not so quick in this burial sequence; the diverse pieces that are put together here have greater emotional weight and wider associations. Synthesis is more complex here, and harder-won: won not so much through an overmastering rhythm as through the numerous correspondences we are made to recognize among the individual pieces.

A cut, with Dovzhenko, typically serves to establish a bond. His tendency, as I have said, is to cut between kindred elements, to bring out, in a juxtaposition, a kinship between different things. Variously juxtaposing one person with another, one action with another, he links together the separate pieces that make up this sequence. He cuts successively between similar close-ups, taken from below, of different young men and women singing at the funeral; he cuts between the excluded priest and the grieving, withdrawn father, both, unlike the young people, photographed from above, two men who have something in common, we are led to realize, in spite of their differences. He makes us see an affinity between the mother giving birth and the naked, sensuous fiancée, both in pain and both richly embodying life; between the wretched, uncontrollable fiancée in her room and the crazed kulak in the fields; between, even, the kulak and the dead Vassily whom he murdered, whose dance he imitates; between the fiancée and a young woman like her who is with the others in the procession singing about the future. An intricate pattern of connections is exhibited, like great poetry rich with concentrated, manifold implications. Affirming the New, this sequence at the same time compassionately embraces the Old—and this is what the Soviet censors must have objected to more than to a few shots of a naked woman. The film then closes as it began, with a sequence of close-ups of fruit, apples and pumpkins on which rain falls, a symbol of natural cleansing and renewal, the assimilation of abrupt change with time passing. The last shot, after the rain stops, is of Vassily's fiancée with a new-found love.

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Elsewhere, writing on Murnau, I brought up Ortega y Gasset's argument that close and distant vision are two different ways of seeing. From close we see an object as a rounded, definite entity, emphatically corporeal; we virtually take hold of it with our eyes. From a distance things tend to appear indistinct and insubstantial, mere patches of light. In close vision we look at solid objects; in distant vision we look more at the space between objects, at the air in which objects are submerged. Piero, and Giotto, paint solid objects; in their pictures everything, whether near or far, seems painted in close-up. Turner, and Velásquez in his late period, paint the air; in their pictures everything seems distant, elusive, ghostly. *Earth* is perhaps the supreme example of the cinema of solid objects, as *Nosferatu* is of its opposite, what may be called the cinema of empty space.

Looking at things from a distance has the effect in *Nosferatu* of making everything seem uncertain, expressing a fundamental uneasiness before the world, giving us the vertiginous sense that nothing in it can quite be pinned down. Contrast this with the clarity and definiteness of Dovzhenko's close-ups, the sense they convey that things are solid and enduring, and can be firmly apprehended for what they are in themselves. The connections things have with one another are also to be apprehended: Dovzhenko makes us see how they all fit together into a larger pattern, an order which is not in someone's head but, we are made to feel certain, there in the external world. Such a stance before things would seem to belong to another, more confident age than ours; the uncertainty about the world we find in Murnau—or the dehumanization we find in Eisenstein, the order that has to be imposed upon the world—accords more with a modern sensibility. Yet there is nothing retrograde about Dovzhenko; he doesn't, either in his art or in his politics, look back to the values of a past age. It is a marvel to find the nobility and grandeur of *Earth* in a work of art of our time.

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WILLIAM H. YOUNGREN

Bix

THAT LOUIS ARMSTRONG AND BIX BEIDERBECKE are the two greatest jazz cornetists is a widely accepted fact. But while Armstrong's best work has long had its share of enlightened appreciation, and while there is general critical agreement about the nature of his achievement and the shape of his career, Bix has always remained something of a mystery. By the time he drank himself to death in 1931, at the appallingly early age of twenty-eight, he had an enormous reputation among musicians but was unknown to the general public. Therefore it is not surprising that a legend quickly grew up around him, that the real Bix of the 150 or so recorded performances got shunted aside in favor of a sort of Jazz-Age James Dean, an intense, driven romantic whose vision of perfection made life in the real world intolerable. In Dorothy Baker's 1938 novel *Young Man With a Horn,* which gave the legend its canonical form, a wise old friend shakes his head sadly and says of the hero's collapse: "That note he was going for, that thing he was trying for—there isn't any such thing. Not on a horn."

Nor is it surprising that the "serious" jazz historians who began cropping up in the forties should have been so offended by the legend and its devotees that they created a sort of anti-legend. Their mission, as they saw it, was to tell the American people that real jazz, the only jazz worthy of the name, was not read from arrangements by large, well-rehearsed groups of white musicians working for highly paid leaders like Paul Whiteman and Benny Goodman, but was created spontaneously by small groups of improvising black musicians. That the spreading of this gospel was a useful service cannot be denied. But for poor Bix, who had been born not only white but also solidly "middle-class" (an epithet always used with distaste by jazz historians), and who had actually wound up in Whiteman's trumpet section, the results were disastrous. In *Shining Trumpets* (1946) Rudi Blesh sternly announced:

> Beiderbecke was and is a pervasive influence. A whole school of white playing, which pretends to be jazz, stems from him; but real jazz is a strong music. Objectively considered, Beiderbecke's playing is weak and weakness characterized his life. It permitted him to play in the commercial orchestras of Paul Whiteman and Jean Goldkette; it led him to ruin his life with drink. All of these happenings are a part of his romantic legend. Volitional acts are mistakenly considered parts of his tragic fate. Bix was neither a tragic nor a heroic character; he was a figure of pathos.

Ten years later, in *The Story of Jazz,* Marshall Stearns referred briefly and patronizingly to Bix's "controlled and tasteful" playing, which reflected

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his "middle-class Davenport, Iowa, background." Even Gunther Schuller, who is in an altogether different class as a listener and writer, devotes only a skimpy (though very perceptive) seven pages to Bix in his excellent *Early Jazz* (1968), while lavishing far more attention on many far less interesting musicians. Schuller calls Bix "one of the truly great jazz musicians of all time," but brands him as a musical "conservative," a man who "set his expressive sights much lower than Armstrong" and who "could not let himself go emotionally."

Whatever their differences, the true believers in the legend and the debunkers who made up the anti-legend have been united in their failure to listen carefully to all of Bix's best records. The former have swooned over a few of the most famous (and admittedly great) "romantic" solos, like those on the Frankie Trumbauer records of *Singin' the Blues* and *I'm Coming Virginia;* the latter, because they believe that real jazz comes only from small groups improvising freely together, have concentrated on the Beiderbecke records that most nearly meet that requirement: the nineteen sides he made with the Wolverines and two pick-up groups in 1924 and 1925.[1] But these are Bix's least interesting records. How many artists would stand up well if judged mainly by what they had done before they were twenty-two? Even the prodigious Armstrong had at that age recorded only a few very promising solos with King Oliver.

But so far as jazz history is concerned, Armstrong was fortunate in the circumstances of his life. Born black and poor in New Orleans, he learned his horn in an orphanage, did his apprenticeship in the marching bands and on the riverboats, was summoned north by Oliver in 1922, and was soon the toast of Chicago and New York and eventually Europe. Even if you agree that he too sold out to commercialism, that somehow isn't as bad as Bix's joining Whiteman. For Louis to turn showman in the early thirties and spend the next forty years clowning it up merely demonstrates the way blacks are exploited by whites in our culture; but for Bix to join Whiteman is a "volitional act" which demonstrates not only the personal weakness evidenced by his drinking but also a contemptible desire to cling to his middle-class respectability. Or so the story runs, judged by the curious double standard produced by the inverted racism so common in histories of jazz. Moreover, Louis did his best playing just where the historians would expect to find it, with small groups of improvising black musicians, on the Hot Five and Hot Seven records and the great blues accompaniments of the late twenties. By the time he turned exclusively to big-band recording, he was already well on the way to the vaudeville act of his later years. (Though right up to the end there was scarcely an Armstrong performance without at least a few stunning moments.) Bix, on the other hand, did much of his best playing where neither the historians nor the adherents of the legend would expect to find it, on the Goldkette and Whiteman records.

[1] These are now all available on a two-record set, *Bix Beiderbecke and the Chicago Cornetists,* Milestone M-47019.

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According to both the legend and the anti-legend, Bix felt increasingly lost and out of place in the Goldkette and Whiteman bands, and it was this sense of isolation that caused the drinking that killed him. But his playing on their records has certainly never sounded as if he felt that way to anyone who bothered to listen to them impartially, free of *a priori* notions about where good jazz (or simply good music) must or must not be found. Therefore it is a pleasure to find that a brilliant and splendidly researched book has at last arrived to tell the true story. The book is *Bix: Man and Legend,*[2] written by Richard M. Sudhalter, an American journalist and jazz cornetist living in England, and based on research by him and by Philip R. Evans, who lives in California and works for the government. Sudhalter writes extremely well, and since, in addition to his own research, he has had the benefit of the interviews that Evans conducted with 684 people who knew Bix, he has not had to rely on the previous writings that helped to create the legend. The result is a book as sensitive in its understanding of Bix's character as it is comprehensive in its documentation of his brief life. As if this weren't enough, there are two long and invaluable appendices, for which William Dean-Myatt joined the collaboration: a chronology, almost day-by-day for the later years, and an extraordinarily detailed discography. There is even a third brief appendix, presumably by cornetist Sudhalter, that clears up once and for all the business about Bix's unorthodox fingering of his instrument. (One's gratitude to Sudhalter and Evans is heightened by the simultaneous appearance of Ralph Berton's silly and meretricious *Remembering Bix,*[3] which is really just the old legend newly tricked out for the swinging seventies, a *Summer of '42* back-dated to the summer of '24, in which a wistful and mysterious Bix provides background music for the thirteen-year-old Berton's sexual initiation.)

The true story is that Bix joined Whiteman not out of an ignoble and self-destructive craving for respectability but because he quite rightly saw that the Whiteman band was the logical next step in his musical education, which he took very seriously. Nor was he driven to drink by the supposedly constraining conditions of the band. His addiction to alcohol had been formed earlier, and while it was certainly aggravated by Whiteman's heavy schedule of theater appearances, concert tours, recording sessions, broadcasts, and one-night stands, Bix fought hard against it precisely because he was very happy playing for Whiteman and wanted desperately to keep his job. When people think of the Whiteman band of the late twenties, they usually think of the onstage photographs, which show almost thirty musicians, or of the absurdly inflated and pretentious "concert" arrangements of Ferde Grofé. But when Whiteman hired Bix, saxophonist Trumbauer, and the superb bassist Steve Brown from Goldkette in the fall of 1927, his idea was not to submerge them in Grofé's scores. His idea—and what else could it have been, considering his

[2] BIX: MAN AND LEGEND, by *Richard M. Sudhalter* and *Philip R. Evans,* with *William Dean-Myatt.* Arlington House. $12.95.

[3] REMEMBERING BIX, by *Ralph Berton.* Harper & Row. $10.00.

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shrewdness as a businessman?—was to set them off to best advantage, theirs and his own. Therefore to a staff that already included two arrangers sympathetic to Bix, Matty Malneck and Tom Satterfield, Whiteman added Goldkette's best arranger, Bill Challis, who was a great friend and admirer of Bix's and was used to building arrangements around him. In the scores that the three of them wrote to feature Bix, the full concert orchestra was scaled down almost to jazz-band proportions and the new arrivals were given plenty of opportunity to display their talents. On the best of the resulting records the band plays with accuracy and drive, and the total musical effect, while not exactly jazz and not meant to be, is very satisfying.

I have always had a special affection for the records Bix made with Whiteman, and so I was very pleased, reading Schuller's book several years ago to review it in these pages, to find that he liked them too. In a footnote, and without going on to apply the insight to particular records, he notes that "there is in the best Whiteman performances a feeling and a personal sound as unique in its way as Ellington's or Basie's," and that many of them "are fascinating musical period pieces, at least as significant in their way as many a mediocre jazz performance which happens to possess the proper pedigree." Sudhalter is to be applauded for going still further and putting the issue still more clearly:

> More than three decades of jazz criticism have made a running cliché of denigrating Bix's work with Whiteman. Too little space to "stretch out," overblown arrangements, unswinging rhythm sections, unworthy musicians as accompanists, unsuitable material to play, inadequate recording techniques—whatever the viewpoint motivating such charges, most of them are demonstrably untrue, at least during the orchestra's Victor period. Their assumption of a single absolute standard in judging jazz performance is borne out neither by the facts of jazz history nor by the testimony of the jazzmen who made it. There seems, at root, a tendency to judge Paul Whiteman and his musicians more in terms of commercial success and the "King of Jazz" soubriquet than on the actual merits of the music.

In their partisan struggle to secure a hearing for classic New Orleans and Chicago small-band jazz and for the great blues singers, jazz historians have been understandably shrill and narrow in dealing with figures like Whiteman. Music like his, which is clearly not jazz but has exploited jazz idiom with a commercial success usually denied to jazz, has seemed particularly threatening and offensive to them. But now they have done their work, the desired hearing has been secured, and the reputations of Bunk Johnson, Jelly Roll Morton, Ma Rainey, and Bessie Smith—not to mention scores of lesser musicians—are firmly established. So everybody should relax. To derive equal enjoyment from a Ma Rainey record and a Whiteman record with Bix is no more peculiar (or inconsistent) than deriving equal enjoyment from Monteverdi and Tchaikovsky. Nobody is going to lose his musical virginity by being exposed to an overstuffed reed

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section and a few violins. In fact one of the pleasures of listening to the Whiteman records lies in following the skillfully contrived interplay between jazz and non-jazz elements. It is a mistake to turn off one's ears when Bix is not to be heard; the real fun is to notice the wit and inventiveness with which his dramatic entrances and dazzling vignettes are fitted in among the half-serious allusions to modern "serious" music and the evocations of the Palm Court at dusk.

So Bix was anything but lost or submerged in the Whiteman band, and the accusation is equally untrue of the Goldkette band, though for a different reason. Jazz historians, with their fierce suspicion that any band (and especially any white band) of more than seven pieces must be in some sinister sense "commercial," have always bracketed Goldkette and Whiteman together. But the Goldkette band was not a large concert organization; it was a jazz and dance band that usually numbered a mere twelve pieces. Many of Goldkette's records, like many of Whiteman's, are of wretched pop tunes sung by unfortunate vocalists who should have been left on the Keith-Orpheum circuit. I had always assumed that the tunes were in the band's book and that the vocalists were part of the Goldkette package, just as the Rhythm Boys and a eunuch trio were part of the Whiteman package. But Sudhalter and Evans discovered that both tunes and vocalists were forced on Goldkette by a troglodyte a.-and-r. man named Eddie King, who was still vividly remembered by Goldkette and his men, over thirty years later, with cold fury. They preferred to remember that in October, 1926, when they made the first of their three triumphant appearances at the Roseland Ballroom, they met and conquered the greatest of Fletcher Henderson's bands. Henderson's (and later Duke Ellington's) trumpet-player Rex Stewart ruefully recalled: "We had the best men, the best arrangements. Everything. Then, suddenly, up pops this band of Johnny-come-latelies from out in the sticks—white boys on top of it—and they just *creamed* us."

Happily, every reader of the Sudhalter and Evans book can now discover for himself the delights of Bix's Goldkette and Whiteman records, since French RCA has recently issued a four-record set[4] containing all of the Goldkettes that are of interest and almost all of the Whitemans recorded for Victor (the most serious omission is the great #4 master of *From Monday On*). The fourth record also has a number of previously unissued masters, as does a Broadway LP.[5] The recorded sound is generally good, though some of the RCA sides have had echo effect added.

The most common thing to say about Bix is of course that he had a beautiful tone. Again Blesh gives the standard verdict of the historians: "Much has been written about Beiderbecke's beautiful tone. Beautiful, it was not hot; nor were the attack and rhythm incisive." True (or almost true), if one is thinking of the early records the historians usually have in

[4] *The Bix Beiderbecke Legend,* French RCA 731036, 731037, 731131, and 741093. Distributed in this country by Peters International, 619 West 54th Street, New York 10019.

[5] *The Unheard Bix Beiderbecke,* Broadway 102. Produced by Broadway Records, Box 100, Brighton, Michigan, 48116.

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mind, but absolutely untrue if one is thinking of his later work. The Bix of 1924 and 1925 did have—in the limiting sense of the phrase—a beautiful tone. Once you know the later work, his early solos seem self-satisfied and a bit placid, overly planned, taking no chances, inclined to fall into rhythmic ruts. Even the unvaryingly beautiful, ringing tone takes on the air of a starlet's fixed smile. The Bix of the beautiful tone is the Bix of the legend, the Bix so successfully imitated by Red Nichols and others, the Bix of the photograph everyone knows best.

It shows him in a dinner jacket, his cornet planted firmly yet casually on one knee, his handsome, serious face staring with Mona Lisa abstraction into worlds far beyond the camera lens. But as Sudhalter helpfully points out, this picture was taken on an August morning in 1921 when an eighteen-year-old Bix had just donned his first tuxedo to play an afternoon job with a local Davenport band. He was on his way not to Jay Gatsby's mansion but to the grand opening of the Moline, Illinois, State Trust and Savings Bank, just across the Mississippi. The Bix of the great solos looks very different. By now a little puffy and heavy-lidded, he sports a small mustache and seems self-conscious when trying to pose seriously, at ease only when clowning. My favorite picture shows him standing on a railroad platform with Trumbauer on the day in 1929 when the Whiteman band started for the West Coast to make the movie "King of Jazz." His proper three-button suit (a bit tight) is buttoned top to bottom, but his bow tie is askew and a handkerchief spills foppishly from his breast-pocket. One hand is thrust carelessly into a side-pocket of his jacket while the other archly holds a cigarette, his hat is tilted rakishly, his one visible eye is alive with fun, and he smiles the sly smile of a racetrack tout.

Of course one can hear the change in the music. Listen to his solo on the first track of the first of the French RCA records, a vapid tune called *I Didn't Know* that Goldkette recorded in November, 1924, when Bix was having an abortive try-out with the band. Then listen to him on the verse of *Idolizing,* recorded in October, 1926, the first tune from the first session after he had joined Goldkette to stay. All the old on-the-beat squareness is gone, and what one notices is not the famous beautiful tone, but the new tonal flexibility, the lazy insinuating grace, the sensitive teasing of the beat, the sudden flurries of energy and the sudden withdrawals—all of which were to characterize his greatest playing. The point about the later Bix is not that he had a beautiful tone, any more than the point about great lieder-singers like Gerhardt and Schumann and Fischer-Dieskau is that they had beautiful voices. The greatness of their art lay in their ability constantly to vary their tonal quality to reveal the expressive intent of their songs. Just so, the greatness of the later Bix lay in the matchless sensitivity with which he constantly (and quite inimitably) varied his tone to meet the expressive demands of the phrases he was improvising.

The records suggest that his big-band work, far from impeding the development of this extraordinary gift, actually encouraged it. Many of the small-band records he made while he was with Goldkette and Whiteman are of course among his finest. He has more solo space and is

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more visible during the ensembles than on the big-band records. But the only musicians with whom the politics of the recording business allowed him to make small-band records were, with few exceptions, his Goldkette and Whiteman colleagues. While perfectly reputable band sidemen, they didn't come within light-years of him as jazzmen. Therefore their inadequacies, and the disparity between them and him, show up more sharply and painfully when they are forced to improvise than when they are reading from arrangements. In the improvised ensembles on the small-band records Bix often sounds as though he is laboring to hold things together, plugging holes left by the others and covering their mistakes. But on the big-band records the arrangements, by supplying him with a fixed and predictable musical frame, leave him free to worry only about his own part. So while there is less of Bix to be heard on the big-band records, what we do hear is more highly finished and more satisfyingly placed in its musical context.

One of the great fascinations of the Goldkette and Whiteman records is in fact to watch Bix's endlessly experimental mind at work as he fits his improvisations to the arrangements that had in turn been tailor-made to fit his improvisatory style. We can see this happening with particular clarity in the many cases where there are two alternate masters of the same tune in existence since Bix, at least when recording, apparently never repeated himself. To take only one example, on Goldkette's *Slow River* his entrance is preceded by a half-chorus scored low for saxes, during which tension steadily accumulates. On the #2 master, only issued in 1936, he perfectly releases the tension by his first notes, which are high, dark, and poignant. Then, in the most beautiful and finely structured of his Goldkette solos, he modulates in eight bars from his initial romantic intensity to a graceful resignation, perfectly summed up in two symmetrical final phrases. But on the originally issued #4 master he takes a different tack. Instead of entering high he enters in mid-range, with a sort of fanfare figure, and so loses the dramatic contrast with what has preceded. Sensing he has got off on the wrong foot, he stumbles through the eight bars, never quite finding his balance. A great deal has been written about the thrill of hearing Bix start forth from the large ensemble—"flashing out of the mire like a snowy egret," as Whitney Balliett once put it. What has not been recognized often enough is that his entrances could not have been so effective if they had not been effectively prepared by the arrangements.

What we hear of Bix on the big-band records, especially those made with Whiteman, is also more various. Knowing only the small-band records, who would have predicted the darting, angular muted choruses on the two masters of *Changes?* Or his hard-swinging muted playing in the famous chase-chorus with Trumbauer on *You Took Advantage of Me?* Certainly no one who had listened to these records could say of his tone that it was beautiful but not hot. Often the arrangements bring out his sense of fun and parody by pitting him against the older faction of the Whiteman band. Listen, for example, to his rollicking ironic commentary on Charles Strickfaden's poker-faced baritone sax on *Sugar,* or to the gusto with which he leads an ensemble that

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wipes out the tremulous muted solo of Whiteman's old lead trumpet, Henry Busse, at the end of *Mary*. Hearing him joyously match wits against the arrangements and the rest of the band, one can easily see why he loved the discipline and challenge of working for Whiteman.

What went wrong then? Everyone who knows Bix's work well enough to feel how much we all lost by his death has been driven to ask why on earth this intelligent and ambitious young man destroyed himself. We are now far beyond the romantic nonsense of the legend and the moralistic nonsense of Blesh's talk about "weakness," and the current fashion is to analyze Bix in psychological or psychiatric terms. But the problem is that from all accounts he was, in all respects but his drinking, perfectly normal. In the hundreds of recollections reported by Sudhalter there is not a hint of any pronounced neurotic behavior—until, of course, the very end, after he was broken by alcohol. But how did that come about? Psychological explanations, like theological ones, will always present themselves to the earnest seeker, and the mere absence of supporting evidence has never stopped a psychological explainer from inventing the desired array of conflicts and complexes. Because Bix was well-mannered, sociable, and easy-going, he has been made out to be a "passive" person. But a look at the chronology in the Sudhalter and Evans book makes clear just how active he was, gallivanting around the country in search of the right band at the right time until he settled in with Goldkette. Steve Brown, for a while his roommate with Whiteman, remembers him as finding time for everything but sleep, "like a bee, jumping from one flower to another." Because Bix never married and had a beautiful and formidable mother, there have been dark mutterings about a crippling Oedipal tie. But now we know that he had a long and—given the conditions of his working life—stable affair with a St. Louis girl named Ruth Shaffner, and that shortly before his death he met another girl named Helen Weiss whom he intended to marry.

Even Sudhalter lets us down, for once, when he confronts the question of Bix's alcoholism and subsequent destruction:

> Despite his apparent rebellion against his home town and its way of life, there is little indication that Bix ever really eschewed its deeper values. But in becoming a professional musician over his parents' objections and attempts to stay his course, Bix had violated the Davenport code, and most of his adult life may be viewed as a long unconscious struggle to eradicate a sense of guilt by striving for "respectability" within his chosen field. . . . His ultimate destruction, viewed in this light, was all but inevitable.

This dreary relapse into jargon is a complete surprise, for of course it is Sudhalter himself who has so painstakingly and convincingly shown how much more than mere respectability Bix sought and found when he joined Whiteman. Pretty clearly, he acted not out of an unconscious striving for respectability or anything else, but out of a perfectly conscious striving for

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artistic fulfillment that was both intelligently directed and temporarily successful. Thus there is no more need to posit a sense of guilt than there is evidence of its existence. Though he went against his parents' wishes—and who can really blame them for feeling as they did?—in becoming a musician, he was never rejected by his family nor did he ever break with them. His vacations and periods of recuperation were invariably spent in Davenport, and his mother visited him in Los Angeles in the summer of 1929, probably to try and get him to come home and rest. So "rebellion" is not a useful word here, even (or especially) if the rebellion is said to be only apparent. Bix went his own way like any autonomous adult, and his family adjusted to his choice as best they could. Nor is there any hint in the rest of the book as to what "deeper values" of Davenport Bix failed to eschew. He seems to have been a candid, warm-hearted, thoroughly unstuffy man, utterly free of the meanly constricted attitudes we (rightly or wrongly) associate with middle-class midwestern small-town life early in this century.

Since the only evidence of psychological disturbance in Bix is the fact of his destruction, to call that destruction psychologically inevitable is as useless as saying it was destined to happen. Certainly his friends saw nothing inevitable about it. Until close to the end they kept thinking that things might still work out for him. The truth is that alcoholism is a very mysterious form of addiction and will simply not yield to pat psychological explanations. The assumption on which such explanations are based is that alcoholism must always have an antecedent psychological cause: there must have been something wrong with the alcoholic's personality structure or with his relation to his family or to society *before* he became an alcoholic. But E. M. Jellinek, in *The Disease Concept of Alcoholism* (1960), has shown that this assumption is a very questionable one, and is in fact not made by most psychiatrists in countries like France and Chile, where custom and social pressure dictate widespread heavy drinking. In such countries, writes Jellinek, "all but a few psychiatrists believe that alcoholism becomes a psychiatric problem only after the excessive drinker develops an alcoholic mental disorder. In the origin of this 'habit,' they see no psychological or psychiatric involvements." Such social pressure can also exist within subcultures, and since the subculture to which Bix belonged was one in which just about everybody drank hard all of the time as a matter of course, it is at least worth asking whether in his case (and in those of many other jazz musicians of that time) we need to look for any deeply-rooted psychological cause of addiction. In recent years we have seen thousands of young people become addicted to drugs without there being any apparent cause beyond social pressure.

It seems more likely that Bix was destroyed by a failure of self-confidence which was the effect, not the cause, of his alcoholism, and which was hastened by two terrible incidents that were not at all inevitable. In late January, 1929, when the band was appearing in Cleveland, he had a violent breakdown, complete with hallucinations. Ironically, it was probably a withdrawal fit, brought on by a forced

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abstention from alcohol during a brief hospitalization for pneumonia the previous month, and perhaps also by a voluntary attempt to cut down after his release. When the band went on to Detroit, he was left in the care of a male nurse. But he escaped, and the day they returned to New York the following week, some of the musicians found him in his hotel room, vomiting and bleeding profusely from a wound in the groin or abdomen. What really happened will probably never be known—indeed it is doubtful that Bix knew. But that was the beginning of the end. After a month in Davenport he rejoined the band for its western trip. But he started drinking again, and at a record date on September 13, he collapsed. (The one last spiritless solo he managed to record that day, on *Waiting at the End of the Road,* can be heard on the Broadway LP.) Despite an apparently successful cure and long periods of abstention, he could never quite bring himself to rejoin the band, though Whiteman himself urged him to do so as late as January, 1931. Seven months later he was dead.

It is of course impossible to say in what direction Bix's genius would have carried him if he had lived. But it does seem a good bet that he would not have wound up at Eddie Condon's, joining the Dixieland stalwarts for decade after decade of *Muskrat Ramble.* As Whitney Balliett has perceptively pointed out, he would probably have been far happier in the company of the great black swing musicians. His last records, made with pick-up groups in 1930, are a mixed bag, and most of the time he sounds tense and exhausted. But there are two sides, both included in the RCA set, that show a Bix who was continuing to experiment and to grow, and that give at least a hint of what might have been: on *Barnacle Bill, the Sailor* he plays a very fast, hot, and rhythmically complex chorus that is years ahead of its time, and on the #2 master of *I'll Be a Friend "With Pleasure"* he has a chorus that starts simply but then grows increasingly oblique and haunting, full of unexpected detours and suspensions. Both are quite unlike his earlier work and make one want to object strenuously to Schuller's labelling him a "conservative." In the few years that he was in his prime Bix Beiderbecke made records that have given, and continue to give, many of us who love jazz some of our most intense and pleasurable musical experiences. The real pain of reading the Sudhalter and Evans book comes from one's realization that his death was no more inevitable than Lipatti's death from leukemia or Cantelli's in an airplane crash: if things had been just a little bit different, he might well have been around all through the thirties, forties, fifties—who can say how long?

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JOHN SIMON

Hippodrama at the Psychodrome

AFTER ITS SUCCESS AT BRITAIN'S NATIONAL THEATRE, Peter Shaffer's *Equus* took New York's critics and audiences by storm. It is well on its way to becoming the first dramatic hit on Broadway in heaven knows how many seasons. Serious plays have been failing year after year on the Broadway stage, where for some years now only comedies or musicals have paid off. It is hard to say why dramas even get produced any longer, except out of stubborn idealism or a stupid mistake. The success of a decent commercial drama, such as *That Championship Season,* may have been the result of its being misinterpreted by the audience as a comedy. On the other hand, a play like *Sticks and Bones,* though full of funny things, could not make it on Broadway, because its essential satire was savagely earnest.

As I am writing, a revival of Tennessee Williams's undistinguished *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* is holding its own; but this, again, may be owing to its comic and dishonest approach to serious themes, and to a spectacular performance by its star, Elizabeth Ashley. But *Equus* is making it without benefit of stars, and, surely, only in small part on its London success. Its impressive production accounts for something, too, though production values alone can't do it—as we saw, for instance, in the case of *Follies.* What is there about *Equus* that may make it the exception to an ironbound rule?

First of all, *Equus* is pretentious, which the public falls for. As must be generally known by now, it concerns the treatment and cure by an English provincial psychiatrist of a seventeen-year-old boy brought to him by a friendly magistrate, who snatched him away from an outraged court. The lad, Alan Strang, who was engaged as a part-time stable boy, viciously and inexplicably blinded six harmless horses entrusted to his care. The overworked psychiatrist, Martin Dysart, fascinated by the oddity of the case, takes the boy on. The saving of this youth becomes the springboard for grandiloquent speculations about what is sickness, and what health.

The pretentiousness infiltrates the entire production, clever as it is. The stage is a small circus arena with overtones of an amphitheater, and also of an operating theatre, and, as the author puts it, of "a railed boxing ring." A railed wooden square can be turned around a wooden circle on casters (is there some mystical implication of squaring the circle?), and this is surrounded by bleachers where part of the audience as well as the performers when they are "offstage" are seated. These actors at times produce choric noises, which further implicate the spectators next to them in the proceedings. The concept of the circus is borne out by the presence of horses, that of the amphitheater by the play's references to Greece, and its supposedly stark, classic qualities. The operating theatre fits in with the brain probe of Alan Strang; the boxing ring, with the intimate contest in which psychiatrist and patient are locked.

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Grandiose as all this is, the author and his director, John Dexter, must have been aiming higher yet: adapting the prestigious Jerzy Grotowski to the establishment theatre. For this stage image derives as clearly from the Grotowskian environments as the seating of actors on the same benches with spectators does from the *Doctor Faustus* produced by the wizard of Wroclaw. No doubt, some of Peter Brook's grotowskianizings also influenced the *Equus* set by John Napier, though it reminded me most of Sean Kenny's décor for the very commercial *Stop the World, I Want to Get Off,* a parallel unlikely to please either Shaffer or Dexter.

Another selling point of *Equus* is that it couches a supposedly serious subject in a popular form, the psychiatric case history acted out as a suspense story: What made young Alan Strang blind those innocent horses? This acting out involves such things as six young men in fanciful equine masks, a certain amount of choreography for these "horses," Oriental modes of stylizing the action, playing to the on-stage and other spectators in a manner bordering on audience participation, a spuriously dragged in nude sex scene, disquieting electronic music by the able Marc Wilkinson, and other good or bad devices to *épater les bourgeois*. But basically it's an old-fashioned thriller, with the evidence coming to light bit by electrifying bit. And beyond that lies the alleged deeper significance—so there is something for everyone.

What is this deeper significance, really? The play begins with Dr. Dysart's soliloquy, in which he wonders about those embraces between boy and horse, and especially about what they mean to the horse, "nudging through the metal" of its "chained mouth" some "desire absolutely irrelevant to filling its belly or propagating its own kind." At the end of the play, Dysart is still wondering about Equus (as Alan has dubbed the horse divinity he worships): "And now for me it never stops: that voice of Equus out of the cave—'Why Me? . . . Why Me? . . . Account for Me!' " Dysart, having cured the boy of his hippophilia or equolatry, has assumed his pathology himself—shades of *The Dybbuk* and, worse yet, *The Exorcist*. He seems to have become both the boy—"I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads"; and the horse—"There is now, in my mouth, this sharp chain. And it never comes out." Clearly, if anyone needs psychiatric help, it is Dr. Dysart.

And what is this hippophilia all about? In a coy and unconvincing program note, Shaffer tells of his hearing the merest outline of such a real-life case from a friend, who, however, died before Shaffer could ask him for further details. If there really was such a case, an account of it could surely be found in newspaper morgues. But Shaffer, as he says, preferred to "interpret" the story for himself; yet, it seems to me, interpretation here means neither more nor less than a covert plea for homosexuality under the equine paraphernalia. This means making the boy's aberration look as seductive and glorious as possible, representing the surrounding "straight" society in the greyest possible light, and implying strongly that the boy is worse off cured than he was before.

In the quoted opening lines, the horse is introduced as a sexuality un-

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related to propagation—clue number one. A few lines later, Dysart complains that he is "All reined up in old assumptions, straining to jump clean-hoofed onto a whole new track of being." Awkward as the image and its wording are, their propagandistic purpose is unmistakable. When Dysart first meets Alan, the stage direction has him staring after his new patient "fascinated," which is hardly the typical reaction of an experienced and overworked psychiatrist. At first, the boy defiantly refuses to coöperate, and, instead of answering questions, sings television jingles. Besides being a part-time stable hand, he has been working regularly in an electric appliance shop, and his fixation on television is virtually all the author tells us about Alan's "normal" life. The dice are beginning to be loaded against the "normal" world by making television one of its salient characteristics.

We learn that the two other psychiatrists at the clinic would be revolted by Alan's case, just as the magistrates were, except for the sympathetic Hesther Salomon who brings the youth to Dysart. Her name tells us that she is Jewish, which, presumably, sets her above the typical Britisher and makes her more psychiatrically oriented. But are any psychiatrists that easily revolted? Unless, of course, they are stand-ins for that "normal" world the play proposes to disparage. Next, Dysart relates a recurrent nightmare of his, in which he is a Mycenean high priest offering up a hecatomb of children—"about five hundred boys and girls"—by cutting out their vital organs for vaticinatory purposes. When the other priests notice that he is losing heart, they attack him, and he wakes up. The child psychiatrist clearly abominates his work, which he perceives as disembowelment. Yet, though the number of human sacrifices is a bit high—even the Minotaur rated only seven youths and seven maidens—it is at least unexceptionably composed of both sexes. By the next scene, however, Dysart confesses to Hesther that he sees in that dream Alan Strang's face on every victim across the sacrificial stone—even on the 250 or so girls, we must infer. Soon we gather that Dysart and Alan have this in common: they both suffer from nightmares. It is these, we learn, that influence the boy to talk to the doctor. A feeble explanation that points to Shaffer's inability to dramatize how the doctor gains the boy's confidence.

Forthwith we are introduced to Alan's parents. Frank, the father, is a printer and an atheist; the mother, Dora, is devout and a schoolteacher who has, it seems, married beneath her station. Frank is given to using phrases like "none of your beeswax" and "if you receive my meaning" with annoying frequency, which, along with his forbidding Alan the joys of television, sets the son against the father. These may not be the most persuasive reasons for filial hatred, but, it must be remembered, hatred or contempt for the father is a classic homosexual pattern. Dora is closer to the son than to her husband (more of the classic pattern, and the first of a series of unsatisfactory heterosexual relationships adduced by the play), and reads to him from the Bible, especially that "splendid" passage from *Job* about the horse, who, with a terrible glory in his nostrils, "saith among the trumpets, Ha, ha." She also teaches him the Latin word *equus*. Frank, on the other hand, speaks ungrammatically, like the lower-class

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chap he is (unless it is the author's own bad grammar), but uses big, presumably printers', words like "insuperable" and "susceptibilities," e.g., quite ungrammatically about religious people: "They always think their susceptibilities are more important than non-religious."

Pretty soon Alan is acting out for Dysart his experiences with the horses at Harry Dalton's riding stable. We might think that among these six equines there would be at least one mare, but no such thing: all six are males, portrayed by lithe young men, standing erect on hooflike platforms and wearing stylized, wire-sculpture horse heads. First, however, we are transported back to Alan's initial experience with a horse as a small boy: a stranger riding by on a beach gave him a lift; we see him being hoisted to the stranger's shoulders, with his legs "tight round his neck." Alan's father opposed this ride vehemently, as he did, we learn from Dora, the religious picture the boy had hung at the foot of his bed, so he could "see it last thing at night." (More "printer's English," though this time from a teacher!) "The Christ was loaded down with chains, and the centurions," Dora relates, "were really laying on the stripes." (There would, of course, have been only *one* commanding centurion, and the stripes would have been laid on by the legionaries.) The implication, then, is that Alan was masturbating himself into sleep with sadomasochist fantasies, and sadomasochism, it should be recalled, often links itself to homosexuality.

When Frank angrily tears off this picture, the crying adolescent is placated with that of a beautiful white horse gazing soulfully over a gate at the viewer. There are now further comments from Alan about that first childhood ride: "The fellow held me tight," and, italicized, "It was *sexy*." We are now permitted—or, rather, obliged—to speculate on how the male Christ figure in a sadomasochist setting is projected onto that imprisoned horse (behind a gate) and the various reins, chains, and whips applied to equines. None of this is developed by the playwright; in fact, he deflects our attention by making Alan inveigh against "bloody gymkhanas" and "equitation," and extol the Cowboy who was free and rode a horse that is "the most naked thing you ever saw." The sadomasochist note is heard again in the quasi-biblical genealogy Alan evolved for his horse-god, Equus: "Flankus begat Spankus. And Spankus begat" etc. Next, Frank tells us about spying on his son during his bedtime ritual obeisances to the Equus image, which consisted of making a bridle and bit for himself out of string, and whipping himself with a coathanger, "increasing the strokes in speed and viciousness." This is all mimed by Alan on another part of the stage, and such simultaneity of time and place, running through the entire play, is yet another of the work's crowd-pleasing devices.

At this point Shaffer intensifies his complementary strategy: from concentrating on making the aberrant Alan as fascinating and likable as possible, he turns to various ways of undercutting and besmirching Martin Dysart's "normal" world. Rather unprofessionally, Dysart makes a bargain with his patient: for every personal question Alan answers, he will answer one of Alan's. And so we hear that the doctor is married to a rather forbidding Scotswoman, who speaks with a thick burr, and is—most un-

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appetizing of medical branches—a dentist! Alan, with what we are told is the uncanny knack of neurotics for unearthing other people's weaknesses, inquires, "Do you fuck her?" and concludes from Dysart's evasions, "I bet you never touch her."

Sure enough, in the next scene, Martin is telling Hesther that "if you're kinky for Northern Hygenic [*sic*], as I am, you can't find anything much more compelling than a Scottish Lady Dentist." Thus the heterosexual relationship that the play examines most attentively is—jokingly, if you like—termed "kinky," and, with patronizing mockery, accorded ironic capitals. We find out that Margaret Dysart has never read the *Iliad,* and when Martin reads from it aloud to her (while she knits for some orphans—oh, the horrors of normality!), she comments that "Agamemnon and that lot were nothing but a bunch of ruffians from the Gorbals." She is, her husband tells us, "The familiar domestic monster . . . the Shrink's Shrink." While Martin looks at illustrated tomes of Greek art and dreams of living by the Aegean, Margaret is "utterly worshipless."

As he hypnotizes Alan, Dysart meditates on "The Normal." Though he concedes certain virtues to it, he labels it the "murderous God of Health," whose "Priest" he is. Even though he has helped many children, he has also "cut from them . . . Parts sacred to rarer and more wonderful Gods." And whereas sacrifices to Zeus took only sixty seconds, "Sacrifices to the Normal can take as long as sixty months." What he neglects to say is that children have plenty of time, and that sacrifices to the normal survive, which is a not inconsiderable difference. Most importantly—and, for the credibility of the play, most damagingly—no one with this attitude would have become a psychiatrist, or, having developed it on the job, have persisted in that profession. We come now by way of highly sexual images, in which terms like "ride me" and "mount me" figure prominently, to the significant passage where Alan reënacts his naked, clandestine midnight rides, but merely mimes getting undressed. For strategic purposes, real nudity is deferred. When Alan rides a horse—usually his favorite, Nugget—he puts a sacred stick into his own mouth, which he calls "the Manbit." Why? "So's it won't happen too quick." The "it," must refer to ejaculation, though why biting on a stick would delay it, is unclear. What is clear, however, is the phallic nature of the stick and its name, with the first syllable "Man," and the second very possibly alluding to its French homonym, *bite*—penis. When Alan jumps on Nugget, the ritual invocation is "Take me!" And when he chants his litanies to "Equus the Godslave" (i.e., God = power, sternness, sadism; slave = masochism), one of the outcries is, "I want to be *in* you."

Act II begins with another meditation by Dysart. After quoting a parallel drawn by Alan between the posture of standing horses and a certain position of ballerinas, Dysart is "alone with Equus." Here our thematic analysis must be extended to stylistics, since the play, clearly, has serious literary aspirations. Dysart speaks: "I can hear the creature's voice. It's calling me out of the black cave of the Psyche. I shove in my dim little torch, and there he stands—waiting for me. He raises his matted head. He opens his great square teeth, and says—*[mocking] 'Why?*.

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. . Why Me? . . . Do you really imagine you can account for Me? Totally, infallibly, inevitably account for Me? . . . Poor Doctor Dysart!' "

This is not good writing: "black cave," "dim little torch," "matted head," "great square teeth" are obvious epithets: "black cave of the Psyche" is a hackneyed image; and there is not much force in that trio of near-redundant adverbs, "totally, infallibly, inevitably." Yet this is supposed to be one of the play's more impassioned, poetic flights; Shaffer, however, is not particularly strong even on simple grammar. In the same speech we get the illiterate construction "And nor does anyone else," and, in a stage direction immediately following, "It is hopefully not observable . . ." To return to style, though, consider an earlier speech of Dysart's in praise of worship, where the good doctor longs for a kindred spirit to take along to Greece and jointly participate in "worshiping a thousand local Gods. And not just the old dead ones with names like Zeus—no, but living Geniuses of Place and Person! And not just Greece but modern England! Spirits of certain trees, certain curves of brick walls, certain chip shops, if you like, and slate roofs—just as of certain frowns in people and slouches . . ." Note the desperate reliance on capital letters; the infelicitious choice of places to endow with a *genius loci,* which becomes ludicrous when we get to frowns and slouches; the ugly sound of "chip shops," and the awkward construction, "frowns in people and slouches."

Presently Dysart insists to Hesther that Alan is a "poor, bloody fool" to trust him, because "Can you think of anything worse one can do to anybody than take away their [*sic*] worship?" After this unscientific and ungrammatical apothegm, Dysart launches on a plangent speech about the dreariness of Alan's "normal" life except for that shining midnight hour "every three weeks—howling in a mist. And after the service [he] kneels to a slave who stands over him obviously and unthrowably his master. With my body I thee worship! . . . Many men have less vital with their wives." I assume that the compositor dropped a word from that last nonsentence, but one can never be sure here about what is a typo, what a stylistic flourish, and what an error.

In any case, the situation described, though not limited to homosexual relations, fits many of them especially well; it is that of the intellectually and socially superior pederast who, out of necessity or preference, seeks out inferior youths for his often clandestine pleasures (like the young men, some of them stable boys, in the Oscar Wilde case), youths who frequently brutalize their homosexual patrons or lovers. Hence the image of the superior human being kneeling to a mere horse, the rough slave that overmasters his master. Here Shaffer comes up with one good epithet, "unthrowably," paradoxically applied not to the rider but to his mount. Yet the illogic of the passage lies in its assumption that worship, itself not an indisputably desirable end, justifies any brutish means by which it is reached. And, promptly, there is the invidious comparison: with a wife, sex is apt to be less "vital." On the contrary, if we are going to appeal to figures and statistics, more people have found sexual fulfillment with wives than with horses. But from the tone of such utterances, I conclude that

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Dysart has missed his calling: he belongs not with the Freuds but with the Billy Grahams of this world.

If "normality" is the patsy in this play, psychiatry, clearly, is the villain. When Hesther reasons with Martin that removing the boy's great pain is surely enough, the doctor stubbornly exclaims, "No." To the understandably puzzled Hesther, he expatiates: "Because it's his. . . . His pain. His own. He made it." This may well be every masochist's credo, and might even be helpful in justifying a coprophiliac's worship of his own excrement, but it is a rather unlikely statement from a therapist—at least while he is sane. Still, if Dysart is mad, the author doesn't say or even suggest it; more's the pity, for a play about a psychiatrist going insane would probably be a damned sight more interesting than one about a dullish boy hipped on horses.

Now Dysart delivers the play's crucial speech. He begins by envying the boy for "a passion more ferocious than I have felt in any second of my life," and for being able to say—in italics, no less—*"At least I galloped! When did you?"* That, alas, is a claim that consumption and several other diseases can likewise make, we know with what consequences. And the doctor tells how he gets his vicarious pleasures from books on Greek art while his "smug" wife is sitting by the fire. "And while I sit there, baiting a poor unimaginative woman with the word ['primitive'], that freaky boy tries to conjure the reality! I sit looking at pages of centaurs trampling the soil of Argos—and outside my window he is trying to *become one,* in a Hampshire field! I watch that woman knitting, night after night—a woman I haven't *kissed* in six years—and he stands in the dark for an hour, sucking the sweat off his God's hairy cheek! Then in the morning, I put away my books on the cultural shelf, close up the kodachrome snaps of Mount Olympus, touch my reproduction statue of Dionysus for luck—and go off to hospital to treat him for insanity. Do you see?"

Well, Hesther does not see, but the audience does, or thinks it does. Yet it certainly does not notice how the cards are stacked when the representative of "normality" is this pitiful fellow, who has not—as the author puts it, delicately and in italics—*kissed* his wife in six years. It does not even make sense. Martin is "kinky for Northern Hygienic," the Dysarts are still young, and Margaret is as Northern Hygienic as ever. So why no sex? Night after night, the spectators give this speech an ovation as thunderous as the hooves of a rampaging herd of mustangs; they clap, cheer, even rise from their seats. In response to my review of *Equus* in *New York* magazine, Robert Brustein wrote me, among other things, "I never thought I'd see an audience stand up and cheer on behalf of sodomy, but I guess you can't ever underestimate the idiocy of Broadway." Now, though a sizable part of the audience may applaud out of joy in being confirmed and justified in its homosexuality, a greater part must have other reasons. Some may applaud to get even with their therapists; some out of a general odium for psychiatry; but the majority, I suspect, to assert their libertarianism, to display their unconventionality. This is rather pathetic when one considers who most of these people are, affluent, bourgeois conformists, who

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wouldn't dream of coming within sucking distance of a sweaty or hairy whatever. Yet this does not make them inferior—except when they are pretending to superior enlightenment, tolerance, and nonconformity.

"Psychiatry," Dysart says, "is really for very ordinary persons," which elaborates on his earlier facile pun: "I shrank my *own* life." This raises a key issue of the play: even if we grant that psychiatry might, perhaps, not be the best thing for an artist pioneering at the limits of understanding, and creating out of his neurosis (though this has by no means been proved), what makes Alan into anything but an ordinary person with nothing to lose? Only that Dysart, as the play and production imply, is in love with him, however chastely. Not even Shaffer himself could, in his senses, defend a superiority based on Alan's sucking of equine perspiration—which is not so much Equus as eeech!—unless, of course, the whole thing is taken as a metaphor. And that, precisely, is my argument.

Now comes the big abreaction scene in which Alan simultaneously talks with his doctor and acts out, with all the people and animals involved, what actually happened. Here we learn of yet another bad marriage, that of the parents of Jill Mason, the stable girl who is attracted to Alan as he seems to be to her. She and her mother were abandoned by her father, who left behind a mere four-word note: "Sorry. I've had it." More cards stacked against "normality." Next, Shaffer hurtles us deep into eye-symbolism and eye-transference. Jill, Alan says, "was always looking," and had "super eyes"; something she, in turn, ascribed to Alan. Jill tells that girls, according to a poll, are supposed to be most drawn to boys' bottoms (girls? I've never heard of such a thing), but that she herself is drawn to eyes. Boys' eyes and, as she adds, horses' eyes. But because Jill is only a female, the play won't allow her love of horses' eyes to be pure; the playwright has her add that she loves them because she can see herself reflected in them. Now comes an encoded but easily decipherable message: Jill says that girls finds horses sexy, at least transiently, but "it's just a substitute really." Horses are a substitute throughout the play.

There follows the humiliation-of-the-father scene. Jill and Alan have gone to see a Swedish sex film, and who should walk in during the climactic shower scene revealing little more than a girl's breasts (Shaffer, by the way, seems to have rather antiquated notions of what goes on in straight porno films these days) but Frank Strang—who then lacks the guts to confess, but pretends that he was seeing the theatre manager about printing some posters for him. To compound his hypocrisy, Frank asserts that, knowing now what kind of films are shown by this man, he will do no business with him. Worse yet, Frank tries to coerce his son into leaving his date and coming right home with him. As Alan asserts himself by refusing, he notices that his father looks scared, which merely arouses the boy's hate. "Bugger! Old bugger! . . . Filthy old bugger!" he keeps repeating, and though the word, in England, need have no sexual connotation, its frequent use in the play is not without its portentousness. At the same time, Shaffer makes Alan say to Jill, "It was like a hole had been drilled in

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my tummy," a childish term that a youth trying to impress his psychiatrist would avoid.

The transference motif has further changes rung on it. An elaborate parallel is already in the works between Jill's and Equus's eyes, with a side-parallel, as it were, to Alan's—and now Dysart discerns that when Alan is staring into the girl's eyes, he really means to stare at her breasts. This is less than convincing, but Shaffer must have felt that, at whatever cost, eyes had to become sexualized here to make what follows credible. There ensues a nude scene, which rings an even falser note. If in the scene where Alan acted out his naked riding the undressing was done only in pantomime, why must he and Jill be literally naked now? Is it that playwright, director, and audience enjoy a bit of nudity along with their "serious drama"? Or is it that since the play is a sort of vehicle for twenty-two-year-old Peter Firth, who plays Alan, this was considered a good way of showing him off? Anyhow, this attempted intercourse scene, which takes place in the stable but out of the horses' sight, does not reach consummation because, as Alan blurts out collapsing, "I couldn't . . . see her . . . Only Him. Every time I kissed her—*He* was in the way." Here, along with Shaffer's beloved typographical devices, capitalization and italics, several themes come together. The boy cannot make love to Jill because of the other, stronger urge for "Him," with the masculine pronoun coming in handy here. But more than that: Alan's seeing Nugget or Equus every time he tries to touch Jill parallels Dysart's earlier remark that all the sacrificial children in his disemboweling dream assumed Alan's lineaments. Transference gallops away with the play, and everything merges in a general slipperiness.

Jill, who, it must be noted, becomes the naughty seductress, luring Alan away from his equine Eden, dresses and departs, leaving the boy behind, alone and nude. Now as Marc Wilkinson's quite effective "Equus noise" goes hog- or horse-wild, Alan and Dysart stichomythically intone a litany of love-hate for Equus, the mocking and jealous "Godslave" whose staring eyes condemn the boy to heterosexual failure (there is some strange lingo here: "God seest! God seest!" Alan exclaims); whereupon, in a kind of frantic nude ballet, Alan, his penis and testicles bouncing at the audience, leaps up to the eyes of Nugget and the other horses, and blinds them with the very pick Jill had taught him how to use!

There is then some strange tergiversation out of Dysart. He puts the hypnotized boy into deep sleep and gazes at him lovingly, first telling him that he is now well on his way to being cured forever. Then he revokes his promise: "I'm lying to you, Alan. He won't really go that easily. . . . When Equus leaves—if he leaves at all—it will be with your intestines in his teeth." A strong image at last, but one to make us long for the imageless prose that preceded it. Then Dysart—first to Alan, thereupon to Hesther, finally to the audience—develops his ultimate lament: instead of making this boy into a good husband, citizen, worshiper, he is "more likely to make a ghost." There follows an elaborately rhetorical antithesis between the prelapsarian and postlapsarian Alan, between "his Field of Ha Ha"

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and the "multi-lane highways," between the lost Equus and Alan's future mini-skooter, "his metal pony." The boy will work in a factory, become plastic all over, and "may even come to find sex funny. Smirky funny. Bit of grunt funny. Trampled and furtive and entirely in control. Hopefully [that barbarism again!], he'll feel nothing at his fork but Approved Flesh. *I doubt, however, with much passion!* . . . Passion, you see, can be destroyed by a doctor. It cannot be created." And in a sad forewell speech to Alan, he foresees the ghastly time when young Strang, without pain (not to mention without his horse-ravished intestines) will see in horses only "gee-gees [to] put the odd fifty P on."

This is complete absurdity. With capitals and italics once again rampant, Shaffer tells us that the only alternative to hippophilia (for which read homophilia) is to see sex as smirky and furtive (but wasn't that what those midnight rides were *par excellence*?), and the sticking of one's fork into Approved Flesh (note the distasteful tone of that trope) with utter passionlessness. Why, if Dysart is a rational being and the fine psychiatrist he is said to be, can't he perceive that if there can be a *genius loci* in slate roofs and chip shops, there can as well be one in mini-skooters and the cars they are traded in for—a god in the machine? And why can't he communicate this numen to a cured Alan?

The play pullulates with dishonesty. Dishonesty toward its avowed purpose, the explication of "a dreadful event," by making that dreadfulness seem fascinating and even admirable. Dishonesty to the audiences, by trying to smuggle subliminal but virulent homosexual propaganda into them. Dishonesty toward the present state of the theatre, in which homosexuality can and has been discussed openly and maturely. Dishonesty to psychiatry, which is depicted as a castrator of bodies and souls. Dishonesty toward normality (whatever that is), by making its representatives and defenders, for the most part, pathetic or unappetizing. Dishonesty to art, which does not abide such facile equivocations as "You will be cured," "You won't be cured," "You will be cured, and less healthy for it," to say nothing of the fudging over of that horse-blinding by doing it as a nude scene, and to horses that are mere metallic masks. Greek tragedy showed no acts of violence either, but found a poetry that could richly convey them. It would not have settled for a Dysart who says feebly—as he assumes, for no good reason given, the boy's sick identity—"I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads," followed by the no less feeble lines about *his* now having a permanent, painful chain in his mouth. Has Dysart become both Alan Strang and Equus?

In any case, the final dishonesty here is toward the very thing meant to be championed: homosexuality. Not only is it obliged to masquerade as zooerastia (also known as bestiality), it is also accorded a false and misleading image. What is the equivalent in basic homophile terms for the key incident of *Equus*, the blinding of the horses? I can find no valid analogies, yet the fundamental obligation of a metaphor or symbol is to create a thorough, functioning correspondence. *Equus* fails all the causes it seems to espouse, except for the dubious cause of spectacular theatricality.

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ROBERT S. CLARK

Music Chronicle

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA THIS SEASON and last has been host to a group of estimable works so far outside the norm for the house that by their very conjunction they proclaim a fresh artistic outlook. Or so it seems—it may be an illusion, or at best a short-lived phenomenon soon to be done in by economic recession, backstage rivalries, and a coming home to roost of unwelcome chickens hatched in the brains of Rudolf Bing and Goeran Gentele. I will return to these generalities later. For now, it may be said in support of my initial proposition that, on top of last season's major success, Berlioz's *Les Troyens,* the Met offered New York audiences a revival of Verdi's great *I Vespri Siciliani,* a Meyerbeer-model grand opera fashioned (as *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*) for Paris, like *Don Carlos* twelve years later, and almost the musical equal of the later work; the austere staging by director John Dexter and designer Josef Svoboda, impressive on its own terms, was at odds with the work's expansive grandiloquence, but every one of the several performances I attended last season and this was splendid musically, thanks to the conducting of James Levine and the singing of such major artists as Montserrat Caballé, Cristina Deutekom, Renata Scotto, Nicolai Gedda, Plácido Domingo, Sherrill Milnes, and Paul Plishka. The house also added Béla Bartók's spellbinding one-act opera *Bluebeard's Castle* (1911) to its repertoire in the spring. In the fall of 1974—when the state of the country's economy in general and the Met's fiscal crisis in particular made its revival of Berg's *Wozzeck* alone seem like sticking its neck out—Benjamin Britten's *Death in Venice* was given its American premiere, Modeste Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* was mounted in a musical version that scrapped Rimsky-Korsakov's "improvements" and reverted to the composer's own originals (1869 and 1872), and Leoš Janáček's *Jenůfa* (1903) came to the Met stage for the first time since 1924. Britten's new opera has been widely publicized and commented upon, and seems to raise no aesthetic questions that the composer's earlier work have not already raised. I had not heard *Boris* in time to report upon it for this chronicle. The Janáček opera, however, presents several matters for the critic's consideration, particularly to one interested in seeing the Metropolitan not only endure but prevail as a cultural institution.

Though the opera house's publicity machine failed to make the point, the three Eastern European works in the current repertoire are linked: the sources of the styles of Mussorgsky, Janáček, and the early Bartók are the nationalism and the realism that pervaded the arts in the late years of the nineteenth century. Janáček based the libretto of *Jenůfa* on a play of Czech peasant life by Gabriela Preissová, written in the dialect of his native Moravia (he was born in Hukvaldy in Moravia in 1854). Mussorgsky's example comes to mind at once, and it is curious to discover that Janáček disclaimed Mussorgsky's influence and disliked his music, *Boris* in par-

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ticular (though he knew only the Rimsky-Korsakov version). Yet the stated aims of the two were close, particularly as they applied to vocal settings. Both wanted the operatic stage, in Mussorgsky's words to the critic Stasov, to hold *"life,* wherever it shows itself; *truth,* no matter how bitter; bold, sincere speech with people *à bout portant. . . .*" And both labored to form musical phrases from the raw material of the rhythms and inflections of everyday speech. Here is Mussorgsky again, in a letter written in 1868, "My music must be an artistic reproduction of human speech in all its finest shades, *i.e.,* the sounds of human speech, as outward manifestations of thought and feeling, must, without exaggeration and forcing, become music that is truthful, precise, *but* artistic. . . ." All of Janáček's operas, from *Jenůfa* to those of the last years of his life, have prose libretti, and the words are the source of the pitch shape and the rhythmic structure of the short musical phrases and ostinatos that underlie the musical fabric. Surely the importance of the original language to the proper presentation of *Jenůfa* could not have escaped the Metropolitan's administration, yet the work was done in an English translation, and a second-rate one at that, by Otakar Kraus and Edward Downes. No explanation was put forward for this decision, but the reasons are easy to guess at: the public might have stayed away from an unfamiliar work in a language so alien to operatic tradition, and it might have been hard to find singers willing to learn Czech who at the same time had sufficient box-office appeal to insure financial success. These are potent considerations, but it is regrettable that, having decided to risk doing the work at all, the administration could not have gone a step further and done it without violence to its artistic integrity. As it is, much of the libretto as sung cannot be understood in any case, and when it can, awkward stress patterns and silly inversions ("if as a soldier my sweetheart is sent away") mar the listener's enjoyment. So, even before the opera began, Janáček's conception was at a disadvantage.

And a second disadvantage—the production—became apparent almost the moment the curtain rose. The scene is a lonely mill set in a cleft in the Moravian mountains; the peasant girl Jenůfa, pregnant by her *fiancé* Steva, impatiently waits for his return from the nearby village, where new recruits are being selected for the Kaiser's army. The set, designed by Günther Schneider-Siemssen, who is responsible for the Met's current *Ring* cycle, is undeniably striking visually, and the rough-hewn, mottled gray surfaces of rock and mill create and sustain the mood of the first-act music well. But there is a decided drawback: most of the singing is done center stage in an area between the two shapes that represent rocks; these slope backward and upward into the wings and the flies of the stage. Instead of focussing the voices and throwing them forward into the house, the set seems to swallow them, and consequently the orchestra covers the vocal lines much of the time. The set for second and third acts, the cottage of Jenůfa's stepmother the Sextoness, where Jenůfa bears Steva's child and the Sextoness destroys it, is at least free of adverse effect upon the singing. But, though again visually striking, it is garish in its vastness and obtrusive in its morose expressionistic glower: it dwarfs the action of the

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drama, which takes place within its spaces but does not bear any relation to them—seems, in fact, to take place almost in spite of them. The impact of the Sextoness's confession that she has murdered the child to clear the way for Jenůfa to marry Steva's half-brother Laca, and the cathartic effect of the final scene between Jenůfa and Laca, are seriously weakened. Within these limitations the direction by Günther Rennert is adequate, but the ending of the second act is a ludicrous miscalculation. Instead of a rattling window that brings the Sextoness a premonition of death, we are given a gratuitous effect that might have been copied from an episode of *The Perils of Pauline:* several windows blow open wildly, backstage lights flash luridly, and bucketfuls of paper snow are hurled inside while the three characters onstage cower in paroxysms of mock terror.

But Janáček's music survives these depredations. *Jenůfa* is a wonderful score: it brims with compelling motives that hammer insistently, then give way only to return and accumulate into affecting climaxes, and it possesses rhythmic life and orchestral color in sufficient quantities to obviate the need for arias, duets, choruses, and the like. (Janáček did not entirely abjure traditional forms: *Jenůfa* does contain solo set pieces and ensembles, and two enchanting choral scenes celebrating Steva's retention of a civilian's freedom in Act I and Jenůfa's wedding in Act III.) Jon Vickers brings to the role of Laca his formidable stage presence and the commanding power and intensity of his vocal instrument, used with greater precision in the attack, and polish in the follow-through, than was in evidence at his Met performances a year ago. No one in the world can sing English with greater bite and fluency than he, and at moments one almost forgave the dreary translation. Unfortunately the role allows his talents limited scope. The opera belongs to the two female protagonists, Jenůfa and the Sextoness, and here the production scored one qualified success and one almost unqualified failure. Teresa Kubiak's voice is a fine one, silvery bright and evenly produced throughout its range, capable of shading and coloration to suit the musical mood, and always under excellent control. She made a touching Jenůfa when she was not indulging in old-school pirouettes and arm-swinging lunges from one prop to another. But her assignment to this role underlines the poor judgment implicit in translating the work: her rote English was cloudy, and she has sung the role in Czech often in Europe. It would be better to draw a veil over Astrid Varnay's much-bruited return to the U.S. to portray the Sextoness: this once-fine singing actress lurched and fluttered about the stage like Miss Marple at a method-acting class (I prefer by far Miss Kubiak's striking of use-hallowed conventional attitudes to Miss Varnay's more "original" self-parody), and her voice, deprived of its power and sheen by time, saddens rather than affects the listener. There was no question of interpretation here, only a vain attempt to propel failing resources through a task to which they are unequal. More's the pity, for as the opera's correct Czech title—*Její pastorkyňa,* "Her Foster Daughter"—suggests, the focus of the action is the Sextoness. Miss Varnay's inadequacy left a gaping hole at the center of Janáček's conception. William Lewis sang well

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enough as the cock-of-the-walk Steva, but does not have either the vocal or the physical presence to fill the role out. In the pit John Nelson had the orchestra in crack form, and moved things along with dispatch, but too often let Janáček's idiosyncratic phrases and rhythms sound just perfunctory.

The Metropolitan Opera's financial and artistic predicaments are many and varied, and with the *sauve qui peut* mood that is closing in on arts institutions everywhere in this recession year, we can expect the newly appointed executive director, Anthony Bliss, to guide the house back—with Schuyler Chapin's help, and if necessary without it—to a bread-and-butter repertoire as heavy on Mozart, Verdi, Wagner, and Puccini as it ever was in the years when the intellectuals regularly savaged Rudolf Bing. Before this happens, let one commentator whose interest in opera extends to all its manifestations, its noble failures and middling mutations as well as its acknowledged masterpieces and facile successes, record his gratitude for the two troubled seasons of the Chapin interregnum. For all the administration's failures in courage and in casting, for all the flaws in this year's *Jenůfa* or last year's *Bluebeard's Castle* or what have you, these two seasons have again made the company a source of satisfaction—mixed with irritation, to be sure—for those who care deeply about music. At the risk of kicking an institution while it is down, I feel compelled to say that the Met might have better luck with critics and public if it treated a piece like *Jenůfa*—or even *I Vespri Siciliani*—with fonder regard for, and greater fealty to, the stated and implied intentions of its composer. But I salute the enterprise and the sense of historical responsibility (not to mention the taste) that got these works onto the boards in the first place, whatever their faults, and I suspect that these years of turbulence, experimentation, failure, and triumph will in the long run prove more rewarding than the more secure and predictable seasons that preceded and—if I guess correctly—are to follow them.

The case of Charles Ives continues to puzzle, amuse, arouse, and confound the musical community. Nineteen seventy-four was the centennial of his birth in Danbury, Conn., and there was a flurry of celebratory activity in concert and lecture halls. American musical sophistication having increased since the days when Ives was chiefly praised for using this or that "innovative" or "advanced" technique—atonality and polytonality, tone clusters, aleatory passages, collage, quotations from popular and folk sources, simultaneous unrelated musical "events"—years before Schönberg or Milhaud or Copland, there were indications that a new consensus might be in the process of forming, catalyzed by the recently quickened interest in what the musical historian H. Wiley Hitchcock calls the tradition of "American vernacular" music. This consensus would make Ives the first important composer to reject transplanted European ideas of form and style, to assert an aggressive Americanism and to try to locate in American "vernacular" hymns, marches, ditties, and fragments of typical musical experiences such as camp meetings, band concerts, and square dances a purely New-World "usable past." What has always been accounted Ives's chief defect—the absence of a coherent and integrated

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composing style—is elevated, in this view, to a virtue, for the deliberate absence of a style becomes the weapon with which the artifice and pretension of European ideas are attacked. Ives, the theory goes, cleared the field for the growth of a native American school of composers who could ignore Europe and pursue their own goals.

Yet Ives himself, for all his scorn of "ladies of both sexes" who favored European Romantic music and "soft-eared" musicians who deplored dissonance, never fully rejected European ideas and practices—he did, after all, write symphonies and sonatas along with the free-form *Tone Roads* and the program music on American themes (itself not far different in spirit from what Janáček and Mahler were doing in Europe). Ives's isolation from contemporary trends, European *and* American, and his unsettled experimental composing habits, iconoclastic and nostalgic at the same time, may not have had much to do with conscious rejection of the European heritage. Writing the program notes for the New York Philharmonic's five-evening "Mini-Festival Around Ives" last October, Pierre Boulez got close to the rub: "The origin of his music, of his invention, is to be found in the surroundings of his life, and from this point of view it is impossible to establish Ives's [historical] *evolution.*" The reason may be that his evolution, ahistorical surely, also lay beneath conscious considerations. In the *New Yorker* for November 4, 1974, Andrew Porter reported on one challenging session of an Ives Festival-Conference organized by the City University of New York and Yale University, in New York and New Haven, in the same month as the Philharmonic's series. In it Frank Rossiter of Princeton set forth the following theory, taking as a starting point the assertion of Henry and Sidney Cowell, in their study of Ives some years ago, that "the germ of every new type of musical behavior that Charles Ives developed or organized can be found in the suggestions and experiments of his father," a band master, music teacher, and student of acoustics in Danbury. Porter summarized the argument:

> Suddenly, toward the end of his [book] "Memos," Ives gives a clue as to what may have gone wrong. He confesses that among the Danbury boys a liking for music was deemed sissy. Music—except for the sound of a band or a rousing gospel hymn—was something for girls and nice old ladies. But Charles Ives liked music. It meant much to him. And—despite Father—he was "partially ashamed" of it; he didn't want to be thought a sissy. Could it be this early conflict that led to his identification of dissonance, vernacular melody, and defiance of rules as "strong," and masculine; of consonance, grace, finished technique, and shapley form as effeminate, and contemptible?

Perhaps, this argument suggests, all of Ives's experiments were an attempt to work out this early conflict in a way that his father and the Danbury boys would have approved. For a composer less baffling and more accomplished we would be correct in rejecting such deep-psyche fishing out of hand (or at least regarding it with suspicion), but it is rather more permissible in trying to make sense out of Ives. A further indication that Ives

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may have been obsessed with the past and only a half-hearted conscious partisan of contemporaneous advanced developments is the testimony of the composer Elliott Carter, who knew Ives as early as the Twenties. As quoted in Vivian Perlis' *Charles Ives Remembered, An Oral History,*[1] Carter recalls dropping in on Ives "around 1929" while he was revising a score:

> He was working on, I think, *Three Places in New England,* getting the score ready for performance. A new score was being derived from the older one to which he was adding and changing, turning octaves into sevenths and ninths, and adding dissonant notes. Since then, I have often wondered at exactly what date a lot of the music written early in his life received its last shot of dissonance and polyrhythm. . . . One could wonder whether he was as early a precursor of "modern" music as is sometimes made out.

One can legitimately wonder that, and a number of other things, about this conundrum of a composer even while acknowledging that at least some of the music heard during the centennial concerts remains fascinating.

To launch a Hunter College series called "Divas and Diversions," the East German *diseuse* Gisela May, whose style was formed as a member of the Berliner Ensemble founded by Bertolt Brecht and his wife Helene Weigel, presented "a Brecht-Tucholsky soirée" in early October. Her program consisted of familiar Brecht-Weill songs from *Die Dreigroschenoper* and *Happy End,* less familiar collaborations between Brecht and Hanns Eisler, and unfamiliar collaborations between little-known composers and the pungent Berlin satirist of the Twenties, Kurt Tucholsky. Miss May's delivery of these songs, most of them socialist diatribes and pacifist plaints, communicated their meaning and their impact even to members of the audience who knew little or no German. She has made this material her own, even such pieces as Kurt Weill's *Surabaya Johnny* and *The Song of Pirate Jenny,* which have seemed, at least to English-speaking audiences, the personal possession of Weill's widow Lotte Lenya. Miss May has pried loose Miss Lenya's grip on these songs, but at the expense of that Brechtian *Verfremdung,* or aesthetic distance, that Miss Lenya's way with them embodied so perfectly. When Miss May's Jenny, for instance, instructs her imaginary private saviors to lop off the heads of all the citizens of the town they are besieging for her sake—with the single word *"Alle!"*—there is visible and audible pain, and her *"Hoppla!"* as the heads roll is just bravado. Miss Lenya's performance on the well-known Columbia recording of "Berlin Theater Songs" (MG 30087) implies by its nervelessness that the bourgeois victims are getting only what they deserve. Fifty years of war, social change, and disillusion with ideology lie between the two interpretations. But the poignancy of Brecht's vignettes and the evocative verve and lilt of Weill's music survive undiminished.

[1] Yale University. $12.50.

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Reviews

MARVIN MUDRICK

The Emperor of China

THIS IS THE STORY[1] OF AN EMPEROR who not only had no clothes on but was first to say so:

> My birth was nothing miraculous—nor did anything extraordinary happen when I grew up. I came to the throne at eight, fifty-seven years ago. I've never let people talk on about supernatural influences of the kind that have been recorded in the Histories: lucky stars, auspicious clouds, unicorns and phoenixes, *chih* grass and such like blessings, or burning pearls and jade in front of the palace, or heavenly books sent down to manifest Heaven's will. Those are all empty words, and I don't presume so far. I just go on each day in an ordinary way, and concentrate on ruling properly.

The date is December 23, 1717, five years before his death, and the Emperor is delivering his valedictory edict to an audience made up of all his sons and the senior court officials. He has had a good and useful life, a very long and "more or less" peaceful reign; he has never been afraid of thinking for himself and attending to everything—

> All the Ancients used to say that the emperor should concern himself with general principles, but need not deal with the smaller details. I find that I cannot agree with this. Careless handling of an item might bring harm to the whole world, a moment's carelessness damages all future generations.

But now he is old and ill ("Now that I am ill I am querulous and forgetful and terrified of muddling right with wrong, and leaving my work in chaos"), and he has other reasons besides for shedding "tears of bitterness" (the audience, in which his sons are assembled, knows that he means to implicate three ungrateful and treacherous sons, and, among the three, in particular the one who will succeed him); "so I have prepared these notes to make my own record, for I still fear that the country may not know the depth of my sorrow":

> Many emperors and rulers in the past made a taboo of the subject of death, and as we look at their valedictory decrees we find that they are not at all written in imperial tones, and do not record what the emperor really wanted to say. It was always when the emperors were weak and

[1] EMPEROR OF CHINA: SELF-PORTRAIT OF K'ANG-HSI, by *Jonathan D. Spence*. Knopf. $8.95.

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dying that they found some scholar-official to write out something as he chose.

With me it is different. I am letting you know what my sincerest feelings are in advance.

(Of course the "final" valedictory edict issued to the country after his death omitted every one of the passages cited here.) At length, having told all, he takes his leave in a serenity of despair:

I have enjoyed the veneration of my country and the riches of the world; there is no object I do not have, nothing I have not experienced. But now that I have reached old age I cannot rest easy for a moment. Therefore, I regard the whole country as a worn-not sandal, and all riches as mud and sand. If I can die without there being an outbreak of trouble, my desires will be fulfilled. I wish all of you officials to remember that I have been the peace-bearing Son of Heaven for over fifty years, and that what I have said to you over and over again is really sincere. Then that will complete the fitting end to my life.

I've been preparing this edict for ten years. If a "valedictory edict" is issued, let it contain nothing but these same words.

I've revealed my entrails and shown my guts, there's nothing left within me to reveal.

I will say no more.

(Of course the "final" edict omitted K'ang-hsi's peroration, and substituted somebody else's: "My Fourth Son Yin-chen—Prince Yung—has a noble character and profoundly resembles me; it is definite that he has the ability to inherit the empire. Let him succeed me to the throne and become emperor. Obedient to the rituals, don the mourning clothes for twenty-seven days, then doff them. Announce this to the people, make it known to all.")

Emperor of China is a beautiful book, though one would like to know more than the editor-translator seems willing to reveal about his method and his materials. The 1717 edict is K'ang-hsi speaking for himself, and there is also a series of letters he wrote home while on a military campaign. The rest of the book, however, is the result of Professor Spence's risky decision to select and rearrange characteristic bits and pieces ("personal expressions"), picked out and put together from this or that imperial document ("scattered and often fragmentary, dispersed in a mass of formal edicts and utterances . . . couched in stereotyped language"); and one would feel obliged to complain (maybe the publisher believed that explanations and parallel passages would scare off the common reader) if it weren't for the fact that out of these constructions, representing various times and preoccupations of K'ang-hsi's long life, comes the same plain-speaking voice which will be heard at the end of his life sounding out the words of his valediction:

The so-called *Seven Military Classics* are full of nonsense about water and fire, lucky omens and advice on the weather, all at random and con-

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> tradicting each other. I told my officials once that if you followed these books, you'd never win a battle. Li Kuang-ti said that in that case, at least, you should study classical texts like the *Tso-chuan,* but I told him no, that too is high-flown but empty. All one needs is an inflexible will and careful planning.

This is the brisk military theoretician, but he isn't a desk soldier, he can speak equally plainly about the very look and smell of all-out war:

> Our troops have chased the Ölöds now for five days. I have seen their abandoned Buddhist scriptures and tents, the women and children and the sick whom they slew themselves, their fish kettles and their brewing apparatus, their hunting nets and their armor, their saddles and bridles and clothes, their food, the wooden spoons still standing in the bowls of soup, their leather skins filled with kumiss—all these poor items of their daily life, all thrown away.

War is waste. K'ang-hsi wants to use things and people (including himself) properly; nothing disturbs him more than waste, lack of use, improper or inadequate use. (He disapproves of suicide because it isn't useful! "I refused my retainers' requests that we visit the precipices [of Mount T'ai] where people sometimes killed themselves, hoping that by offering up their own lives they might save those of their dying parents. I refused to condone such acts by visiting the place where they occurred; for even if the suicide was committed in the name of filial piety, by killing himself the victim cut off forever all chances of helping his parents.") Almost anybody can be used—for instance a cloistered scholar, with the customary scholarly weakness for superstition and sycophancy, who may in time and upon attentive cultivation be turned into a useful provincial governor:

> At first his memorials were too long and in the wrong format, and he passed on a report that magical *chih* fungus had been found on a mountaintop under a fragrant cloud, sure proof of the Emperor's virtue and promise of long life to come; and even though he knew I did not value such auspicious omens, he was duty-bound to send it in to the palace, so I could examine it or use it for medicine. I replied that the *Histories* are full of these strange omens, but they are of no help in governing the country, and that the best omens were good harvests and contented people. Later his memorials were shorter, there was no more *chih* fungus, and he became a sensible governor.

In a world of unexhausted usefulness, compassion itself can be practical: when another governor, appointed because of his incorruptible honesty, is "condemned to death by the Board of Punishments for panicking about pirates and unlawfully killing several innocent people in jail," the Emperor "refused to punish him, but told the Grand Secretaries: 'He is truly not a man fit to be a governor. Yet he can prevent bribery, and has great integrity. Let him be put in charge of some financial post where

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there's not too much going on.' " Authority is life and death: "Giving life to people and killing people—those are the powers that the emperor has"; and K'ang-hsi prefers life: "He knows that administrative errors in government bureaus can be rectified, but that a criminal who has been executed cannot be brought back to life any more than a chopped string can be joined together again."

Not religions so much as their practitioners puzzle and exasperate him. Heaven is hope but earth is labor. "This is what we have to do: apply ourselves to human affairs to the utmost, while remaining responsive to the dictates of Heaven. In agriculture one must work hard in the fields *and* hope for fair weather." With the Jesuit missionaries in Peking he is pleased to study "Western arithmetic and the geometry of Euclid," surveying, astronomy, horology, hydrostatics, mechanics, music ("in the early 1690's I often worked several hours a day with them"), and he learns a great deal and uses it; but when they begin to talk doctrine he turns them back politely ("I asked Verbiest why God had not forgiven his son without making him die, but though he tried to answer I had not understood him. . . . I would gladly witness some of the miracles they talked about, but none was forthcoming"), and when the Roman Curia tries to move in with one of its own roving agents he denies the request brusquely (because at least the resident missionaries have been dedicated enough to choose to live out their lives in China). Among the Chinese themselves, the Taoists are quick to promise believers long life and unfailing health, but K'ang-hsi notes that "I have seen them age like other men." The trouble with religious people is that their experience of religion seems limited to a sort of frivolous sacrilege:

> The meaning of the Great Way is not lightly to be explained. Some of these adepts' words are even harder to believe, they chill the heart and make me shiver—claims to "arrogate to oneself the cosmic creativity and rival the shaping forces," to "bring together the Five Phases and reconcile the Eight Trigrams," or to "never grow old," or "become like Buddha or the Jade Emperor."

What religious people look for is the end of the line, revelation, stasis, "understanding." In a conversation with Stravinsky (as reported in Robert Craft's *Stravinsky*), the poet Henri Michaux extolled the "understanding" he derived from his experience of hallucinogenic drugs, whereupon Stravinsky retorted: "I prefer thinking to understanding, for thinking is active and continuous, like composing, while to understand is to bring to an end." K'ang-hsi prefers thinking too, and doesn't find it incompatible with mysteries. Doubtless there are unencompassable mysteries, mysteries beyond words (and beyond understanding), but we have only words and the human voice—"the primal sound in the whole world"—with which to approach them now here now there, from this side or that:

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I have never tired of the *Book of Changes,* and have used it in fortune-telling and as a source of moral principles; the only thing you must not do, I told my court lecturers, is to make this book appear simple, for there are meanings here that lie beyond words. The written word has its limits and its challenges; for the primal sound in the whole world is that made by the human voice, and the likeness of this human voice must be rendered in dots and strokes. Therefore, I have practiced my Chinese calligraphy regularly, often writing more than a thousand characters a day; I use my own hand to write my edicts, I copy ancient calligraphic styles in my old age (as I used to when I was a boy, studying with my eunuchs in the palace), and I also practice my Manchu writing, to keep it clear and fast. Yet I never forget that the voice, too, is important: when my name appears in the invocations to the gods, I tell my ritual officials: Don't mumble or hesitate. Speak it in a loud voice, clearly, and without fear.

K'ang-hsi, second Emperor of the Ch'ing dynasty, was only one generation removed from the Manchu tribes his great-grandfather and grandfather had united into a confederation that would eventually take over all of China. "As a Manchu who had learned the Chinese language in his later boyhood, K'ang-hsi wrote with a simplicity and directness rarely found among those scholars (or emperors) whose deeper knowledge of the language led them to frequent flights of literary hyperbole and allusion." For more than sixty years, during a reign nearly contemporaneous with Louis XIV's, he ruled an immense and populous country (150,000,000 people, at a time when France, the major power of Europe, had one-eighth as many). He shared some of Louis' problems: dominated in his boyhood and youth by a regency that he threw off as soon as he dared; early involved in a civil war which, even after he had won it, darkened the remainder of his reign; living so long that he was plagued by cabals which inevitably formed round the Heir-Apparent and other possible successors: but, though the formally denominated "Son of Heaven," no unique Sun-King; an active and prudent administrator, not a despotic chief clerk; a man thinking, not a superb pattern of manners. He was a Manchu warrior, and had little to say about women: "I keep only three hundred women around the palace, and those who have not served me personally I release when they are thirty and send them home to be married." He spent many months of his life on military campaigns: his "reign was a time of territorial expansion and border warfare, and his troops captured the island of Taiwan in 1683, defeated Russian forces and leveled the fortifications at Albazin in 1685, waged protracted campaigns against the Zungars in the far west and northwest during the 1690's"—

And so it was that, in the far northwest in the bend of the Yellow River in the early summer of 1697, I heard the news that Galdan, abandoned by nearly all his followers, had committed suicide. As I wrote to my

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eunuch Ku Wen-hsing: "Now Galdan is dead, and his followers have come back to their allegiance. My great task is done. In two years I made three journeys, across deserts combed by wind and bathed with rain, eating every other day, in the barren and uninhabited deserts—one could have called it a hardship but I never called it that; people all shun such things but I didn't shun them. The constant journeying and hardship has led to this great achievement. I would never have said such a thing had it not been for Galdan.

"Heaven, earth, and ancestors have protected me and brought me this achievement. As for my own life, one can say it is happy. One can say it's fulfilled. One can say I've got what I wanted."

He loved hunting (especially in the bleak north country of his ancestors), and now he remembered another time of rejoicing:

Five years ago, on one of my hunts, in the autumn of 1692, just as I was finishing dinner, came news that a bear had been cornered among some rocks in a small wood. I rode out immediately, reaching the wood just before sunset. At first neither shouting, nor beating on trees, nor cracking our whips would dislodge that bear, but finally he roared and came out into the open country. My huntsmen rode along beside him, at a distance of fifteen or twenty paces, and steered him to a defile between two hills. There I shot an arrow at him, which hit him in the side and pierced his stomach. He tore at the arrow, breaking it in pieces, ran a few paces and stopped. I dismounted and took a pike in my hands and, with four hunters at my side, carefully approached the bear and speared him, killing him outright. Never, I told my retinue, had I enjoyed a hunt so much.

Could anybody but the Emperor of China have commanded such pleasures, and on such a scale?

This is the story of a man who dreamed he was Emperor of China.

To Our Readers:

THE HUDSON REVIEW announces that increased production costs have made necessary a rise in its subscription rates. Effective with the Summer 1975 issue, domestic subscriptions will cost $9.00 per year; Canadian and foreign subscriptions $10.00. New subscriptions will be accepted, and two and three year renewals and gift subscriptions will be honored at the present rates until June 1, 1975.

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J. E. CHAMBERLIN

Poetry Chronicle

In Act II of *Prometheus Unbound,* Shelley introduces his reader to "the realm of Demogorgon . . . whence the oracular vapour is hurled up." Those of us who do not hold Demogorgon among our familiars will perhaps need to be reminded that he has been around, in irresponsible disguises, at least since Plato discovered in his myth of the creation that beneficent manufacturer of the cosmos whom he called the Demiourgos. His name was passed down through the years, though it mysteriously became too terrible to mention, and his home in the depths too terrifying to visit; Lucan, Statius, Boccaccio, and Tasso tell of him, and finally English literature recognized his omnipresence—Spenser referred to him as the keeper of the hideous chaos, and Robert Greene called him "maister of the fates." Then Milton, most adept at such investigations, pronounced that he was in fact the ancestor of all the gods, named Chaos, begetter of the earth, dweller in obscurity . . . no, no, no . . . that was a rhetorical flourish, an oratorical prolusion, which we are not encouraged to trust. No, indeed. From *Paradise Lost* comes another, slightly less awesome, more manageable, Demogorgon—a dweller, with dreaded name, in Chaos, where Chaos itself is (along with Chance) an Umpire of the competing and conflicting elements of unorganized existence. And finally Shelley, writing in "language which is to be taken partly in a metaphorical meaning, and partly in no meaning at all" (*Quarterly Review,* 1821), in a poem "spoiled by the great sin of modern poetry . . . it wants sanity" (J. Slater, 1884), presents us a very profound Demogorgon, source of the deep truth, embodiment of the laws which inform the universe.

It is wonderful to meet Demogorgon once again, and in such a fine setting, where the only image which comprehends the deep truth is that of a *Sphere,* and where the creative spirit takes *The Form of a Motion.* A. R. Ammons' long poem[1] is immensely ambitious, and is premised upon his belief that

> the purpose of the motion of a poem is to bring the focused, awakened mind to no-motion, to a still contemplation of the whole motion, all the motions, of the poem: this is very
>
> different from hypnosis

It may be very different from hypnosis, but it certainly involves the same kind of ritualistic subversion of normal identifications, and a similar confusion of the categories of experience, as prevailed during Asia's visit to the cave of Demogorgon. Still, there is a recognition that

[1] SPHERE: THE FORM OF A MOTION, by *A. R. Ammons.* Norton. $6.95.

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one

needs clarities to know what one is baffled by, the small
left-and righthandedness: suppose one saw the nonsupportive
clearly: how could the mind, lit up and possessed, find

energy for salvation's befuddlement: to confront nothingness,
the best baffler, is to disengage monsters and prevent
lofty identifications

Confronting "nothingness, the best baffler" and confronting Demogorgon is the same process, and the consequences depend upon one's attitudes, one's awareness, one's allegiances. Some monsters, of course, are more comfortable than others, as are some identifications, especially when they merge into one supreme fiction, "real supreme with hot-shot convincingness/ and lashes laid on lavishly for the doubter." But the supremest of all fictions, that of there being an order in chaos, is inseparable from the most comfortable, that of there being a single self, our self, perceiving that order:

what you
made to be greater than you is and enslaves you and then
suppose trying to be free again you begin upward desperate

identifications until those identifications enlarge beyond
you and terrify you and move you out of the frame of actual
gestures: take my advice: the forces are there all right

and mostly beyond us but if we must be swayed by the forces
then at least let's be the only personalities around, the
sort of greatness a raft in a rapids is and at the top

let's put nothingness, good old: the most open suasion:
a darkness in the method, a puzzling, obfuscating surface,
is the quick (and easy) declaration of mystery, with the risk,

though, that should the method come plain, be made out, the
mystery, surficial, its elements jumbled, would disappear,
unless, of course, under the quick establishment of difficult

method the true mystery survived

Ammons is fascinated by the pleasurable ironies of

ordered accumulations, massive suasions: if
nothing shaped stays and shapelessness is dwellingless, where

can we dwell: as shapes (bodies) we dwell only in the flow
of shapes, turning the arcs of mortality: but the imagination,
though bodiless, is shaped (being the memory or imagined

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> memory of shapes) and so can dwell in nothingness: the human being is as inscrutable and unformulable as a poem, or, if possible, more so

In one of his lessons on "the nature of real forms of movement," Paul Klee told his Bauhaus students that

> movement is inherent in all becoming, and before the work is, it must become, just as the world became before it was, after the words "In the beginning God created," and must go on becoming before it is (will be) in the future.

What this means, when theory and practice eventually merge, is that

> from the cosmic point of view, movement is the primary datum, an infinite power that needs no extra push. In the terrestrial sphere matter obstructs this basic movement; that is why we find things in a state of rest. It is a delusion to take this earthbound state as the norm.

And what does this cosmic norm, and cosmic point of view, offer? Certainly, uncertainty:

> this afternoon I thought Jove had come to get me: I walked into a corridor of sunlight swimming showering with turning shoals of drift pollen and not yet knowing it was pollen thought perhaps I
>
> was being taken or beamed aboard but saw over the roof the high swags of the blue spruce swaying and felt stabilized from wonder

It is a lovely phrase, and it is such stabilities with which we comfort ourselves as we wonder "how are we to entertain the time/ and space: can we make a home of motion."

The cave of Demogorgon is, then, "under all life," where

> fly and
>
> dandelion, protozoan, bushmaster, and ladybird, tendon and tendril (excluding protocellular organelles) is the same cell: and under the cell is water, a widely generalized
>
> condition, and under that energy and under that perhaps the spirit of the place: if we sink we go awash: so thanks for the surface if also for the deeps

Among these deeps we journey, unenlightened, but carried by the newly enchanted boat, sailing after lunch, to Byzantium. And Ammons' poem is as catholic as its vehicle, its departure, its destination. It owes (and pays)

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a great debt to Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron ("if all else fails, / try hocus-pocus to bring your writing into focus"), Whitman, Crane, Stevens. This is Ammons' "magnum hokum"; and although he, as Horace Walpole said of John Wesley, is a little too inclined to "act an ugly enthusiasm," still he writes well, and is "at clarity of zooming, unpassed in Cayuga Heights, unparalleled . . . possibly."

Ammons borrows some of the affectation that Whitman adopted as his mask, while Whitman himself is most cleverly exposed in one of Richard Howard's delightful *Two-Part Inventions,*[2] entitled "Wild Flowers." The scene is Camden, New Jersey, in January of 1882. Whitman is awaiting a visitor.

> Doctor says: bar them. I can't. I won't.
> Still, they bother me. One young fellow walks in,
> says, "Walt, I should like to
>
> read you my epic
> and have your opinion of its worth."
> "Thank you," say I, "but I've been paralyzed once
> already." Suppose someone
> took it in his head
> to come and sit here and say nothing!
> someone who knows even the first syllables
> of the great speech of silence . . .

His visitor knows the speech by heart; and even has a syllable or two to silence doctors.

> A doctor is all very well when *you* are,
> but only then—*then* they can offer comfort!
> When one is ill, doctors are most depressing.

Who other than Oscar Wilde, who reads to a bemused Walt from Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal,* and speaks of art and life and sacrifice. "The sympathy of the artistic temperament," Wilde remarked elsewhere, "is necessarily with what has found expression." Whitman had found expression, and Wilde had an artistic temperament, and a conviction that "everything that is realized is right." The dialogue that Howard invents is uncommonly right, and quite well realized, as are all of the six Inventions that constitute his latest volume. "Only mediocrities progress—masters / revolve," Wilde comments to Whitman, and Howard skillfully describes the revolutions and revelations of Hölderlin, Ibsen, Edith Wharton, Rodin, and Alessandro di Fiore, as he recreates the sense of exquisite surrender and flagrant romanticism of which Wilde wrote in *De Profundis.*

While Christ did not say to men, "Live for others," he pointed out that there was no difference at all between the lives of others and

[2] TWO-PART INVENTIONS, by *Richard Howard.* Atheneum. $4.95.

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one's own life. By this means he gave to man an extended, a Titan personality. Since his coming the history of each separate individual is, or can be made, the history of the world. Of course Culture has intensified the personality of man. Art has made us myriad-minded. Those who have the artistic temperament go into exile with Dante . . . they catch for a moment the serenity and calm of Goethe, and yet know but too well why Baudelaire cried to God:

O Seigneur, donnez-moi la force et le courage
De contempler mon corps et mon coeur sans dégoût.

"To write," confesses Ibsen to his early beloved Sophie,

is to say *I am*
not the only one. But even here
above the blue surge and the white surf,
I am the Babylon I must go
out of, or I perish

It is a fine and an exciting volume that Richard Howard has written, with its perfect harmonies, mainly silent, like the dance of Valéry's Athikte, or of the Khmer dancers whom Rodin adores:

Theirs is a silence which has more to do
with adoration than with sensuality . . .
We come to our senses and resume worship
of the god. I tell you—I am trying
to tell you: desire does without a face—
it makes do, and leaves us without "ourselves."

Monsieur, you tell me
what I know: friendship and love, *they* are ourselves
when we are, friendship and love are someone:
desire is anyone.

Anyone else. I call it an alchemy, Monsieur.

Though David Wagoner's new volume, *Sleeping in the Woods*,[3] is not entirely successful, his honesty and his craftsmanship are splendidly apparent, and his (occasionally annoying) affectations are genuinely consistent with his interests. In many of these poems, the poet rather uncertainly compels our sympathy with his particular commitment, while leaving to luck our own commitment to that compulsion. Often, he carries it off with a flourish, for he has a pleasant skill:

Selective logging, they say, we'll take three miles,
It's good for the bears and deer, they say,

[3] SLEEPING IN THE WOODS, by *David Wagoner*. Indiana University. $5.95.

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More brush and berries sooner or later,
We're thinking about the future—if you're in it
With us, they say. It's a comfort to say

Like *Dividend* or *Forest Management* or *Keep Out*.
They've managed this to a fare-thee-well.
In Chicago, hogs think about hog futures.
But staying with the facts, the facts,
I mourn with my back against a stump.

But in some cases, even when the poem is quite well ordered, it is disappointingly inadequate to compel a sense of the significance to which it is committed:

The water plunged at its work
From slab to slab, alone,
Into pools moss-dark at noon.
I came to a stand of alders
As pale as my bones
And waited a dead hour
In the thawing dirt at their roots
Like them to begin again.

The significance that Wagoner sees in all things is a very demanding one, and these demands become the reader's expectations through the instrument of the poet's transparency. The scheme is fairly simple: nature exists to provide a lesson in organic form and its processes, in whose imitation and recreation poetry excels, surpassing painting and music with a delicate burst of inimitable complexity. Such poetry is compounded of the major aesthetic traditions, the classical and the romantic; and its arrogance in insisting that its sister arts are relatively toothless when it comes to defending oneself against the barbarian has not been recognized. For the advantage of poetry which Wagoner takes is that it can say something in its saying. Calling selective logging "the immoral equivalent of a forest fire" is one, rather excruciating, and not very uniquely poetic, extreme. Trying to pray, "but rising no further/ Than the head I've bent for it" is another, more clever, one.

The best poems in this volume are of two kinds. Most numerous are those in which the truth of the moment appears (at the least) to give validity to the style, though the precise distinctions, and the points at which the validity impresses itself upon us, are never quite clear:

For a mile by green-and-gold light, wading upstream,
Uncertain of our feet in the rush and shimmer
Among the touching ferns, by our touching fingers,
And led by wren-song through alders felled by beavers,
We came to a pool flowing deep

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And swift below water-striders, where the shelving moss
Gave way at last to our bodies on the shore.

And then there are those in which, very clearly, the style compels our belief in the truth which the poet presents to us . . . in which our belief is the root, our believing the stem and the leaves, and the thing believed is the flower. The psalms are perhaps our noblest example of this process; and Wagoner's "Seven Songs for an Old Voice" belong in their general company, as his "Song for the Soul Returning" makes apparent:

Without singing, without the binding of midnight,
Without leaping or rattling, you have come back
To lodge yourself in the deep fibres under my heart,
More closely woven than a salmonberry thicket.
I had struck the rocks in your name, but no one answered;
Left empty under the broken wings of the sun,
I had tasted and learned nothing. Now the creek no longer
Falters from stone to stone with a dead fishtailing
But bursts like the ledges of dawn, the east and west winds
Meet on the hillside, and the softening earth
Spreads wide for my feet where they have never dared to go.
Out of the silent holts of willow and hazel, the wild horses,
Ears forward, come toward us, hearing your voice rise from my mouth.
My hands, whose craft had disappeared, search out each other
To shelter the warm world returning between them.

Robert Penn Warren has published what he conceives as "a single long poem composed of a number of shorter poems as sections or chapters," and entitled *Or Else: Poem/Poems 1968-1974*.[4]

I wonder if it will ever get there. The wondering throbs like a bruise inside my head.
Perhaps it throbs because I do not want to know the answer to my wondering.

The poet is wondering (in a fine poem, "Forever O'Clock") about a beat-up old 1931 green Studebaker. I wonder about the poems; like the newer Studebakers of the 1940's, one is unsure even about which direction it is that they are meant to travel. This wondering, I might add, is not stabilized or stabilizing as it is in Ammons' poem. But it is continuously encouraged, with some nice surprises and lovely effects. Some are almost sentimental, yet still encompass the poet's use of words, his craft: the marvellously Faulknerian close of the "Ballad of Mister Dutcher and the Last Lynching in Gupton," for example:

Mister Dutcher is not there to
walk the same old round like a blind

[4] OR ELSE: POEM/POEMS 1968-1974, by *Robert Penn Warren*. Random House. $6.95.

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mule hitched to a sorghum mill, is,
in fact, in some nook, niche, crack or
cubby of eternity, stowed
snug as a bug, and safe from all
contumely, wrath, hurt ego, and
biologic despair, with no
drop of his blood to persist in
that howling orthodoxy of
darkness that, like speed-hurled rain on
glass, streams past us, and is Time.

"The True Nature of Time," in fact, is presented in a most basic poetic tradition, in "The Faring":

Once over water, to you borne brightly,
Wind off the North Sea cold but
Heat-streaked with summer and honed by the dazzle
Of sun, and the Channel boat banging
The chop like a shire-horse on cobbles—thus I,
Riding the spume-flash, by gull cries ringed,
Came.

And some of the poet's touches are very wonderful indeed.

The hawk,
Entering the composition at the upper left frame
Of the window, glides,
In the pellucid ease of thought and at
His breathless angle,
Down.
Breaks speed.
Hangs with a slight lift and hover.
Makes contact.
The hawk perches on the topmost, indicative tip of
The bough's sharp black and skinny jag skyward.

The hawk, in an eyeblink, is gone.

Always, Warren is tense with "the baroque ironies of Time"; and the Poem is the accumulation of its mannered Poems, and of the Wordsworthian

process whereby pain of the past in its pastness
May be converted into the future tense

Of joy.

The questions which Warren asks himself are hazily reflective, and in a comforting way they reinforce our certainties.

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Why had I not seen the tree before?
Why, on entering, had I not seen it?
It must have been there, and for
A long time, for
The boughs are, of all green, long since denuded.
That much is clear. For the floor
Is there carpeted thick with the brown detritus of cedar.

Christmas trees in our section always were cedar.

Those which George MacBeth[5] asks are unsettling, enigmatic, subversive—questioning not the senses but the motives, the bases of perception:

Yes, but the final detail
about the pig track,
how it was the quickest way,
starting above the hotel,
why do I leave that out?

This new collection, *Shrapnel and A Poet's Year* (which was originally published as two separate volumes in England), is ruthlessly bizarre, with a vicious nervousness about many of the poems. They are compelled by a gothic ritualism, which educates the sensibility to that predicament which has so many names—evil, ego, imago, and which inevitably accomplishes the collision or collusion of energy and design. The categories of personal, social, and aesthetic experience are fused by MacBeth until we are left uncertainly caught in a web of imaginative intrigue, bound fast by a metrical concision that is as deft as a magician, as tight as the knots he ties. Some of the pieces are slight, but "Even the most ordinary detail/Can be a surprising wonder . . ." as poets and their readers have always known. And the best of these poems are small, nerve-wracked masterpieces, especially the "War Poems," and most especially "The Broken Ones."

He speaks, as always, in
That strangled candour, and my whole world burns
As he announces marriage. I begin

Through violent air
To dwindle from his days . . .
And I turn to prayer,

Not for myself,
Though that has been, but for my closest friend,
The polio-torn, the brave one. Cracked and spewed
From the world's belly, that will never mend,
I ask the blood-shot to let up their feud

[5] SHRAPNEL AND A POET'S YEAR, by *George MacBeth*. Atheneum. $7.50.

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For a short space
And honour him, as I. May he and his
Through casts of measured silence and true sound
Flourish and never sicken. May his alliance
Bleed into glory from far underground

And rise in sons
To blaze for ever in the night of shells
That bred us in the North. May he in joy
Walk through the morning to the chant of bells
And wake in marriage. May no power destroy

That healing love
I see, and fall from. Turning to the flame
That seems to burn for ever in my head,
I settle from his changing, still the same,
Loving the broken ones, the never dead.

MacBeth is uncannily adept, moving from an intricate aloofness to a relaxed conspiracy:

Anyway. There was that
Nice time in South Molton,

Wasn't there? I begot
Image on image. You

Foxed every cadence.
Willy is now the rage

According to Elspeth.
Willy Yeats. That old shit.

And the juxtapositions which he effects are rather like capriciously and hugely arrogant metaphors:

The blinds come down. The candle dies,
And universal darkness lies

All round the world, I have the wife.
I smoke a pipe. It makes a life.

It is a very good volume of poems.

Margaret Atwood[6] adopts somewhat the same attitudes as MacBeth . . . but oh, the difference to me. Her "Songs of the Transformed" (Pig, Bull, Rat, Crow, Worms, Owl, Siren, Fox, Hen's Head, Corpse) and the

[6] YOU ARE HAPPY, by *Margaret Atwood*. Oxford University. $3.25.

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"Circe/Mud Poems," for example, are similar in spirit to MacBeth's catalogue of "The Soil Kings" and his "Love Prayers," and one might at least expect some of the same sharp shocks. The premises are equally obvious, and the voice that of an equally obvious victim. But Atwood, though she might wish to be, is not Abel, nor even Christabel.

In addition to the limitations of her pose, and to the awkwardnesses which arise from her wearing the wrong mask to tell the truth that she would have us hear, her diary/chop grammar creates expectations of intimacies which are disappointed by being announced with too rhetorical a flourish. Her paradoxes are illegitimate, depending upon an agony which is too consciously contrived, and unsustained by logical, imagistic, or metrical persuasions (the other traditional justifications for her manner of presentation). "Pray for me/not as I am but as I am." Quite simply, I cannot trust these poems, nor are they untrustworthy in an exciting way. Poetry, after all, is a serious and dangerous game, playing with words, thoughts, feelings. I, for one, don't have much else. But the elements of Atwood's poetry and of her own predicament are carelessly squandered, and the reader is little convinced of the importance of caring when the poet clearly does not:

> I lie on the mattress; re-
> playing the man trudging
> through the snow, hunting
>
> for his enemy / which is the snow
> looking for something to shoot
> and finding nothing / I rehearse again
>
> the polite and terrible slogans
> by which we live (no matter
> how courageous failure is failure)
>
> This is no eviction.
> I wish you would shut up.

This fruitless act is hearsed and re-hearsed throughout the volume. One's expectations are laughed at, one's imagination turned into fancy. Atwood plays cheap tricks, tricks with more than mirrors.

> You don't like these metaphors.
> All right:
>
> Perhaps I am not a mirror.
> Perhaps I am a pool.
>
> Think about pools.

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One of the least compelling of the poems, "Is/Not," concludes with lines that are abysmal but sadly typical, and which catch the spirit of the exercise:

> We're stuck here
> on this side of the border
> in this country of thumbed streets and stale buildings
>
> where there is nothing spectacular
> to see and the weather is ordinary
>
> where *love* occurs in its pure form only
> on the cheaper of the souvenirs
>
> where we must walk slowly,
> where we may not get anywhere
>
> or anything, where we keep going,
> fighting our ways, our way
> not out but through.

Atwood uses a wilful obscurity to pretend to profundity; her fashionably arcane invitations do not function as initiations; and the imperatives which she histrionically declares are facile—childish whimpers, adolescent moans, social anguish.

Brendan Galvin[7] is not yet a master at conjuring up local spirits, but he is very good:

> I live under wide cellar beams, inhaling a dirt floor,
> for years shouldering the past's footfall.
> At one end, in a grove, I fish from a tall rock;
> the hornpout sting
>
> until my wife taps a low door
> and lets me out.

And his metaphors are exact and entertaining: behold, for example, the camels,

> the beasts
> whose rabbit faces
> are singed with knowledge,
> whose necks insinuate
> music wheedled
> from slow pipes.

[7] NO TIME FOR GOOD REASONS, by *Brendan Galvin*. University of Pittsburgh. $2.95.

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On feet like the plates
of mine detectors
they are coming at their pace
over what may be the same ground
volleyed forward and back
in the ignorant wind.

In a catalogue of such metaphors, describing a "Thunderstorm, Cape St. Vincent," he gives the volume its title:

And yes, it is angels
fighting it out with no. 9 irons
across the heavenly links,
it is all these and more because now
is no time for good reasons.

Not only are we made to realize that metaphors are essentially unreasonable, but Galvin rushes us along through his poems with a kind of precipitate energy that persuades us that somehow, somewhere, there is an urgent need to accept these contradictions at face value, to embrace them as true falsehoods, logical illogicalities, sensible nonsense, reasonable unreasonings. He does not quite reach the point at which somehow and somewhere become here, and in these poems; but he is close. It is a poet's ploy, and it is impossible to ignore its appeal, and its defiance. But there are risks, which Galvin takes almost too gladly. On the one hand, he has a somewhat tedious tendency to scatter images and metaphors too haphazardly; on the other hand, and at the other extreme, he allows a certain monotony in the structure and movement of individual poems, of which his description of "Crows" provides a typical instance:

Darker than dark, dark leaves
them undefined.
Their bad report
rackets about the eaves,
moiling the deep
cool eddies of our sleep.
They've got the goods
on us. The worst we fear
is true:
they are here for more than sport.

Both of these faults are indigenous and relatively venial. They mar the volume as a whole, however, and contradict the easy grace which Galvin wittily affects.

There are innumerable ways of organizing one's poems, of which one of the least useful is to do so alphabetically by title. It is a pity that Celeste Turner Wright made this choice, for the poems which she includes in *A*

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Sense of Place[8] need the support which the coherent sensibility and organic continuity of a chronological arrangement might supply. It is, nonetheless, a good collection, and one which displays a remarkably accomplished craftmanship:

> Sit where you are upon the grass and raise
> Your eyes to portents in the clouds above me,
> And let me read in that translucent gaze
> What miracles must follow when you love me.
> I shall upset the universal order,
> Tasting more rapture than the rules allow,
> And overskip the consecrated border
> Of mediocrity that hems me now.
> With such a lever, I can move creation;
> Glowing with double courage I shall dare
> Topple dictatorships and ease our nation
> Of all the grievances it groans to bear.
> I cannot yet announce when this will be;
> Your eyes on April clouds are baffling me.

The poems written in the early 1940's of which the above is one, should be together; they are the achievement of a certain kind of whimsical dismay which the poet has moved away from, and they form a particularly fine group, with their subtly predictable rhythms.

In more general terms, and with reference to the entire volume, the poet's response is of a clear and precise sort, and it is disconcertingly convincing:

> Silence is better than this fervency
> From sources even to yourself unknown—
> An indiscriminate humanity
> Or some embosomed grievance of your own.
> May God forgive us, not for sharing pain
> But showing love we cannot long sustain.

Her subjects vary from the apparently slight, in "Lines Commending Self-Deception":

> A connoisseur appreciates illusion,
> Prefers the golden mirror to the true,
> Seeks after love's delectable confusion,
> And grows immortal with a glass or two.
>
> So let my peach twigs flower in my office,
> My pulses flutter with imagined spring,

[8] A SENSE OF PLACE, by *Celeste Turner Wright*. The Golden Quill Press. $5.00

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And let no bee's unnecessary logic
Disturb the hum of air-conditioning . . .

to the unfathomable, in the unsettling portrait of "The Parson's Wife":

He did not mould this body to embrace
A demigod, these useful hands to be
Rumpling informally the atrocious grace
Of panthers dozing, nor this soul to flee
Singing through interplanetary space.
Will He be angry? Will He punish me?

She has a Wordsworthian awareness of the limitations of language and song, and a nicely ironic common sense pervades these poems:

You smile, envisioning the awkward hand
Or tongue or brain unequal to such art,
Harmony, science; but today I stand
Helpless as my forefathers to impart
A simple thought through language or expand
My universe to reach another's heart.

Charles Tomlinson[9] is a poet of an unerring and acute sensitivity, capable of startling perceptions of the underlying patterns which inform all things, central or eccentric:

> At the edge of conversations, uncompleting all acts of thought, looms the insistence of things which, waiting on our recognition, face us with our own death, for they are so completely what we are not. And thus we go on trying to read them, as if they were signs, or the embodied message of oracles. We remember how Orpheus drew voices from the stones.

He does not make the mistake of insisting himself; he is a collector of other insistences, and humbly discovers the occasional "Promise":

The tide goes down, uncovering its gifts:
  Rocks glint with the silver of slivered wood,
Like the piecemeal skeleton of some great boat,
  That this light of resurrection, if it could
Would draw together again, and the next tide find
  As solid as the cliff that looms behind
Its absence now. But part of a scene
  That is flawed and flowing, the pieces lie
Under a fragmented rainbow's promise
  Of the changes in their unbroken sufficiency.

[9] THE WAY IN, by *Charles Tomlinson*. Oxford University. $4.95.

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This volume is a chronicle of the limitations of the imagination:

> How far from us
> even the nearest are
> among these close leaves
> crowding the window:
>
> what we know
> of that slow then sudden
> bursting into green is merely
> what we have seen of it and not
>
> (fermenting at its heart)
> darkness such as the blind might hear:
> for us, there is no way in where
> across these surfaces
>
> the light is a white lie
> told only to hide the dark
> extent from us
> of a seafloor continent.

It is also a chronicle of the limitations of reality:

> It took time to convince me that I cared
> For more than beauty: I write to rescue
> What is no longer there—absurd
> A place should be more fragile than a book.

For Tomlinson is not quite certain of the structures of perception, and it is their uncertain stability that his poetry celebrates. His skill is to catch in words that which is constantly withdrawing, or disintegrating, however insistently it returns or reforms again, and in whatever guise.

> The water, wind-impelled, advancing
> Along the promontory side, continually
> Shaves off into spray, where its flank
> Grazes against rock, each white
> In-coming rush like a vast
> Wheel spun to nothing, a wing
> Caught down from flight to feathers.

And so into words. Some of these are desperately poetic:

> The lamps are on: terrestrial galaxies,
> Fixed stars and moving. How many lights,
> How many lives there are, cramped in beside

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This swathe of roadway. And its sodium circuits
Have ousted the glimmer of a thousand hearths
To the margins of estates whose windows
Blaze over pastoral parentheses.

Tomlinson is always aware of what poetry has to offer; a different world, perhaps, aware of its difference, or the same world, reawakening to itself in a vision of Albion:

The ways
He walked seemed variants on a theme
Shaped by a need that was greed no longer,
The dream of a city under the city's dream,
Proportioned to the man whom sleep replenishes
To stand reading with opened eyes
The intricacies of the imagined spaces there
Strange and familiar as the lines that map a hand.

Not by any means the least of Tomlinson's gifts is his rich and comforting humour, ordered with irony and wit, confident with compassion, announcing a wise consolation to all . . . even to the Double Bass:

You are the foot a hundred others
Tread by, the bound of their flying islands
And their utopias of sound. Tristan is being sung to
Like a drowsy suckling: you
Are sanchoing still: that, I know,
Is the story of another hero—but you have ridden
With them all to their distress, and lived
To punctuate it, unastounded in your endless
Unthanked *Hundesleben,* nose to ground.

Charles Tomlinson, "betrayed into verse," is one of modern poetry's most talented martyrs:

Season of mists and migraines, rich catarrhs,
Pipes in the public library throbbed and hissed
Against your advent.

Heating systems and critics have all too much in common. I for one should like to shiver my delight into print.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

Our Man in Twit'nam

CHRISTOPHER CAUDWELL, THE MARXIST CRITIC who was killed in 1937 while fighting with the International Brigade, once put his finger on an embarrassment felt by many people over their affection for the poetry of Alexander Pope. At least I feel it over mine. He wrote: "Pope perfectly expresses the ideals of the bourgeois class in alliance with a bourgeoisified aristocracy. . . ."[1] What could be plainer? Pope's concern was for restraint, balance, order, in short, for "reason," as I think is well-known and unquestioned, but in our own intellectual world we have scarcely a single reputable standpoint along the whole spectrum of opinion, radical or conservative, from which we can view such a concern with much sympathy.

> Pope's poetry . . . is a reflection of that stage of the bourgeois illusion where freedom for the bourgeoisie can only be "limited"—man must be prudent in his demands, and yet there is no reason for despair, all goes well. Life is on the up-grade, but it is impossible to hurry. The imposition of outward forms on the heart is necessary and accepted. Hence the contrast between the elegant corset of the eighteenth-century heroic couplet and the natural luxuriance of Elizabethan blank verse. . . .

So Caudwell pins Pope wriggling, in a time categorically different from ours, on the exact ethos of the rising Protestant middle class, which we have been taught to despise.

Peter Quennell, who is probably the best of Pope's biographers, makes the same point, at least with respect to style, in his discussion of Pope's *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*.[2] He quotes three lines from Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi:*

> Now the echo hath caught you . . .
> I told you 'twas a pretty one: you may make it
> A huntsman or a falconer, a musician, or a thing of sorrow.

And next to them he places four lines from a similar "eerie moment" in Pope's poem:

> What beck'ning ghost, along the moonlight shade
> Invites my step, and points to yonder glade?
> 'Tis she!—but why that bleeding bosom gor'd,
> Why dimly gleams the visionary sword?

[1] *Illusion and Reality* (New York: 1937), p. 86.
[2] *Alexander Pope: The Education of Genius, 1688–1728* (New York: 1968), p. 145.

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Again what could be plainer? The comparison makes Pope ridiculous. Often enough he is. And it is a ridiculousness that easily entraps his readers, who move from the brilliance of his best writing, lulled by his beat and his music, into passages that are far from his best without noticing the difference, until suddenly they come to and realize that the brilliance has been supplanted by utter rococo nonsense. This, too, is just what we have been taught to despise, taught by the whole weight of modern literary feeling from the earliest pronouncements of Pound and Williams down to the present day.

Yet Pope at his best still appeals to our sensibilities. The pleasure we get from reading him is unmistakable. Moreover there is nothing antiquarian about this pleasure because the best of the poems—the *Dunciad,* the moral essays and epistles, *The Rape of the Lock,* and some of the minor poems—are living poetry still, which we read in the same way that we read any other poetry, old or new. In consequence we more and more are seeking ways to overcome our embarrassment, that is, to retrieve Alexander Pope from the stereotyped figure he has been since the time of Hazlitt if not before, and to make him into a *poet,* one among the company of poets with whom we live on familiar terms. I think this can be accomplished easily enough. We need only pay attention to the quality of his writing. Pope was a superb writer, and the wonder is that the job hasn't been done long since, yet it hasn't, at least not adequately and not as far as I know; even Saintsbury's thorough and often agreeable account of Pope's prosody is defective in certain aspects of technique. Another time I may have a shot at it myself. But now I am more interested in the cultural elements of the stereotype.

Was Pope actually an apologist for the rising bourgeoisie of post-Revolutionary England, as Caudwell suggests? Was he in the midst of the movement, a product of it and spokesman for it? Or was he not rather an outsider? He may have wanted to participate in that upsurgence of new social and economic power; in some sense he obviously did, he even longed for it. But he simply couldn't manage it. He was a Roman Catholic, for one thing, automatically suspect in a society still afraid of Jacobitism; and for another, he was a hunchback and almost a dwarf, suspect, again automatically, for his inability to play a "normal" sexual role: no woman would have him. And he was a radical. Of course I don't mean a revolutionary; Pope believed in social order, even in hierarchical social order. But he had a radical's innate distrust of power, whatever form it takes. This was part of what made him a poet, and it grew only stronger as he grew older. Beyond that he was a Lockean through and through, philosophically speaking. How could someone raised on Catholic theology take so wholly to the philosophy of the English revolution? I don't know. Yet Pope did; and when I recently reread Locke's *Second Treatise of Government* I was pleased to see that with only the ordinary allowance for historical anachronism it contains almost nothing incompatible to the philosophies of Proudhon or Max Stirner, which came a century and a half later (to say nothing of native American anarchists like Warren and Andrews, or even Thoreau). In short, far from being an apologist for his

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society Pope was a radical critic of it. Has there ever been a more bitter denunciation of the power of money in capitalist society than his *Epistle to Bathurst?* True, Pope's radicalism was very different, as different as can be, in *tone* and *emphasis* from ours. He believed in order, while for us order has become so monumentally oppressive that we lash out against it altogether. Yet where would we be finally without that concept at the root of our radical thought and feeling? As for Pope, he insisted, always, that what he meant by order was *natural* order, and I believe we have good reason to infer that his idea of it was not far after all from what later theorists called the "classless" society. In other words Caudwell has overstated the case. We must read his assertion with an addition and a change of emphasis: "Pope perfectly expresses the *ideals* of the [historical] bourgeois class . . . , etc."; not the practice but the ideals, which were Locke's ideals—liberty and natural order—and Jefferson's too, and maybe not so far from Tolstoy's or Kropotkin's—or humanity's.

Over the years, in reading Pope and in reading as much as I could about him, I have been struck by the similarity between him and Dante. Both were outsiders, exiles in their own countries; both were poets who conspicuously sublimated their sexual energies in their writing; both were political poets motivated by visions of moral virtue, who dealt with actual political mechanisms in their poems—they named names. I don't mean to exaggerate the resemblances, of either kind or degree. Dante's situation as a poet was more propitious than Pope's in almost every respect: culturally, linguistically, philosophically, etc. Hence Pope was a satirist primarily, made so both by the necessities of literary evolution and by the self-consciously settled, uninventive attitude toward values in his time. Yet a distinction exists between Pope and other satirists. Swift—and I do not forget the fourth part of *Gulliver* in what I am saying here, though I know devoted Swifteans will dispute the point—Swift was fully aware of his situation in the "age of reason" and took every advantage of it in his writing; Pope did the same of course, but in his best work, such as Book IV of the *Dunciad,* he transcended his situation. He transcended satire, as Dante had transcended the *dolce stil nuovo,* and produced work which, though nothing like the *Commedia,* nevertheless stands classically apart from genre and reaches outward to the universal heart of human existence.

At any rate if Dante is the paradigm of the modern poet Pope fits the model, in his work and his life, as well as anyone and better than most. Thus he ought to be, and I believe he is, accessible to us; more, he is amenable to us. Two recent books, by Patricia Meyer Spacks and Frederick M. Keener, help to show us how.[3] Unfortunately both books are written by and for scholars. I know there is no use in flogging a dead horse; but damn it, does the experience of humane learning have relevance any more or not? We have reached a point at which the only serious considerations of the poetry of Allen Ginsberg are produced

[3] AN ARGUMENT OF IMAGES: THE POETRY OF ALEXANDER POPE, by *Patricia Meyer Spacks*. Harvard University. $10.00. AN ESSAY ON POPE, by *Frederick M. Keener*. Columbia University. $10.00.

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solely for academic ends. Such specialization seems to me pitiable, pitiable—all the more when the people who engage in it have something useful to say. Professor Spacks has investigated the imagery in Pope's major poems to show how the poet used metaphor, simile, and concrete images of many kinds to convey not only feelings and attitudes but quite precise ideas. The fact is that Pope's poetry contains far less direct statement than you would expect to find when you consider the topics of most of his poems. Another critic, Martin Price, has made the point too, namely, that Pope's poetry gives "more the effect of Metaphysical wit than versified argument; it is dialectical rather than didactic."[4] *Didactic:* the term stuck onto the poems for two hundred years; no wonder people detested them, or thought Pope no more than a somewhat superior Wigglesworth. I repeat: Pope was a poet, a poet in *our* sense. Naturally he used poetic means. He used wit, by which he meant, as far as I can make out, exactly the same thing that Coleridge meant by imagination. He was "dialectical," in the sense adapted from Kant by modern critics and applied commonly to such poems as the *Cantos* and *The Waste Land*. Spacks has demonstrated the case admirably, I think, with close readings from many texts, extended comparisons backward to Dryden and Donne and forward to Eliot, and many citations from her fellow scholars. If she nowhere gives us a statement of the meaning of her work as pointed as the one I have given here, if she fails to see the value of *Eloisa to Abelard* among Pope's secondary works, and if she writes a prose that is—well, I've said my say about that: it is academic; but in spite of all, her book is useful, and I think nonacademic people who like to read Pope (if any are left besides me) could benefit from looking at it.

Professor Keener's book is more critical and less scholarly, a work of literary intent, and as such is written with at least some ambition toward good style. Unhappily Keener is finical. His writing builds clause on clause, modification on modification, and so does his argument, three steps forward and two back, until in some passages the reader finds himself totally confused. But Keener's objective is clear. It is to study the voice of the narrator in Pope's poems, the evolving persona from first to last, and then to relate it to what is known of the poet's life and character. The result is not biography and is not intended to be. It is more a species of mythography. It is an attempt to describe the poet, the figure of the poet that Pope progressively invented for our benefit, and to discover the meanings and values attached thereto. In some respects it is similar to Maynard Mack's very fine book about the relationship between Pope's poetry and his landscape gardening, country life, and Palladianism in general.[5] What Keener discovers, of course, is that Pope the poet, the creator revealed inside his poems, is more than a persona, he is a personality; and he becomes a clearer and clearer personality as the poetry matures. When Keener says that "Pope came to incorporate more personal experience in

[4] *To the Palace of Wisdom* (Garden City, N. Y.: 1964), pp. 140–41.

[5] *The Garden and the City: Retirement and Politics in the Later Poetry of Pope, 1731–1743* (Toronto: 1969).

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his poems than had any English poet preceding him," we can only agree, at least if the "incorporating" is understood to have been explicit rather than implicit. What's more, the personality emerging from this personal experience becomes more and more attractive—to my mind right up to the end. Keener (perhaps inevitably, considering his focus of interest) prefers the livelier figure of the narrator in the epistles and moral essays, but for my part I would never reject the dark, bitter narrator of the *Dunciad,* whose intelligence and love, half-hidden though they may be, are instinct in every line, especially in Book IV. But mainly what Keener shows us is a *poet using himself,* virtually creating himself, and doing so in terms more realistic and complex than any other poet until Hardy. It is an observation of real importance because it so plainly develops the affinity between Pope and us.

And perhaps this is the point to emphasize for general readers here. The two books I have reviewed, as well as other recent books I have mentioned and a good number I have not, are aimed toward divesting Pope of the historical inertness that has encumbered him for two centuries or longer. We need a Pope to whom we may not only respond but relate, in the peculiar literary symbiosis that keeps literature—past or present, there is no difference—alive. Between Milton and Blake no poet plays this role for us. Pope is the logical choice, not only for his pre-eminence but for his own qualities as man and artist, and we need him; we need him there, in that time, speaking to us from that large region of sensibility. Pope can do it. And whether or not I am right in thinking that in spite of his Tory trappings he can speak to us in our radical concern, he certainly can speak to us as a poet who shares our attitudes toward the human predicament. Here is one more quotation, this from G. Wilson Knight:

> His [Pope's] focal centre is man; not man dramatically interlocked with a great mesh of natural and cosmic energies, as in Shakespeare; nor man and his universe torn by the "mighty opposites" of conscience and culture, as in Milton; nor man viewed variously according to the subject, political, religious, or literary, as in Dryden; but Man who in himself must achieve the synthesis or harmonization which religious and political schemes are always claiming to achieve for him, and with no great warlike or other actions to assist his self-escape.[6]

In short, existential man. And to my mind existential man is not only Pope's "focal centre," and not only the inferential product of his arguments, but his own mythologized creative self. If such a man cannot speak to us, then I don't know who can.

[6] *Laureate of Peace: On the Genius of Alexander Pope* (New York: 1955), p. 9.

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RICHARD PEVEAR

Tatlin!, or the Limits of Fiction

A STORYTELLER IS NOT A FICTIONIST. But we are so used to fiction, because we live within fiction, in a way, and see it from the inside, that we are not sure what the difference is. Storytelling declined as fiction writing increased. But it is not a question of written forms driving out oral forms. The books of Apuleius, Malory, Rabelais are not fiction either, and *Don Quixote* is not fiction, though it is often called the first novel. Fiction became clear to itself when it saw that it must be absolute, that it must displace the reader's existence with its romance of reality. The key to the nature of fiction is that under its spell both the author and the reader disappear. Verisimilitude is of less importance than the spell, the unique consistency of the performance. Evgeny Zamyatin, the Russian modernist, experimented with the fantastic, the stylized, the most abstract constructions in his fiction, yet the spell remains intact. In an essay on "Theme and Plot" (originally a lecture to students of the writer's craft) Zamyatin gives the following advice against authorial intrusions and lyrical digressions:

> These were often employed by Gogol, as in his "Troyka." Among the new writers, we find such digressions in Remizov and Bely, both of whom derive from Gogol. This device, however, although it achieves its end, giving the reader a rest and diverting him from the flow of the plot, has a serious drawback: it permits the reader to awaken for a time, it cools him and weakens the spell of the work. *It is as though an actor were to remove his makeup in the middle of the play, say a few words in his own voice, and then go on.*

I have underlined this last sentence to make clear how precisely Zamyatin has defined, in principle, what Brecht would have called an alienation-effect. Brecht conceived of the use of alienation-effects as a way of playing thought against illusion in his theater, a way of breaking the spell of the performance and re-establishing its humanity. It is this that Zamyatin indirectly counsels against.

Brecht's was an art of interruption, quotation, dialectic; Zamyatin's an art of continuity, coherence, persuasion. There are ways in which both principles are at work in *Tatlin!*[1] But to the extent that they can be compared with other work, the stories in *Tatlin!* recall Zamyatin's stories in that, although they contain a wealth of narrative invention, the invention does not go outside the limits of fiction. There is reason to think that it might have done so, and even that that is what Davenport intended. But what is really at stake here?

[1] TATLIN!, by *Guy Davenport*. Charles Scribner's. $7.95.

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I recently came across two interesting quotations from Ford Madox Ford. The first, from *The March of Literature,* repeats Zamyatin's advice against authorial intrusions: ". . . the introduction of himself by the author in order to draw the moral would have the effect of completely destroying the reality of the scene for the reader. The reader would say to himself: 'Hullo. I really thought this was something real I was looking at. . . . So it's only a silly novel!' " (Exactly, Brecht would say.) The second is from an article on "Techniques" in which Ford says that "the purpose of technique is to help the writer please" his reader: "By pleasing him, you hold his attention, and once you have done that, you may inject into him what you please: for you need not forget . . . the gravity of your role as educator: only you must remember that in vain does the fowler set his net in the sight of the bird." Ford's language is more disturbing than Zamyatin's. Zamyatin only wants to keep the reader from waking up in the middle of the story; Ford wants to snare him in an invisible net and inject some kind of education into him. Brecht wrote, in another context, "So long as the masses are the *object* of politics they cannot regard what happens to them as an experiment but only as a fate. They learn as little from catastrophe as a scientist's rabbit learns from biology." What is at issue in this debate is not just a question of literary forms but of forms of imposition and forms of liberation. The techniques of fiction make the reader into the rabbit. The scientist is the author, with his grave role as educator. There is a great condescension in this, and something more sinister as well. I am exaggerating, of course; Zamyatin and Ford were both men of good will, and there is no sinister purpose in their work. Nevertheless the similarity of the methods of fiction and the methods of ideological imposition is something worth thinking about. Is it possible that the age of fiction prepared the way for the age of ideology, for a kind of murderous literalism?

Brecht understood, despite his play with ideology, that the art of storytelling was free and that it was the opposite of the fiction writer's demonic performance. In the situation of storytelling, the teller and the listener cannot forget each other's presence; the story is spun out between them, and its images are interwoven with their reality without obscuring it. Storytelling was the first form of theater; it was also, in a way, the first art of assemblage. Stories handed down to us in books, which we can read as fiction, are only scripts left over from a dramatic event that took place once, and repeatedly, in the telling. The situation of storytelling abounds in alienation-effects; belief in the story is freely offered and is always provisional; it is not enforced by illusionary techniques, the rule of consistency, the double disappearance of author and reader. Plato preserved the situation of storytelling in his dialogues, and it is clear that what he prized was the non-obligatory nature of the story and the shared freedom of hearing and speaking. The principle of dialogue is interruption, as the principle of storytelling is interweaving. By contrast, the principle of fiction is non-interruption, the unbroken flow of the writing, which is like the flow of dreams. And we are present to fiction as we are present to our dreams, in suspension.

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The storyteller and his listener are equals; at any moment they may change places. But an author, Chaucer's *auctor*, is an authority, who decants truth into his readers, as Mandelstam said, by virtue of the physical law of unequal levels. The pedagogical model is a recurrent motif in *Tatlin!*, a thread that ties the stories together: Tatlin, in the title story, is shown teaching at the Ceramics Institute, the Abbé Breuil at Lascaux, Herakleitos at Ephesus, Adriaan van Hovendaal at the university and in private with his disciple Bruno. The law of unequal levels applies in each case. The master speaks, the pupils admire and take notes. No questions are asked, there is no dialogue. Knowledge is an attribute of personality. This pedagogical model is the averted face of fiction.

The cult of authors, and by extension the cult of all eminent authorities, is a natural outgrowth of fiction. It is perpetuated subjectively in the reader's preference for one fictional world over another, objectively in biographical and historical criticism, or in aesthetic connoisseurship, which are ways of avoiding the work while dealing with it. The cult of authors takes the place of a free participation in the truth of the work. We understand art better than anyone ever has, but we no longer know what to do with it.

The highly developed critical sensibility of the modern era is a product of fiction. The *Tatlin!* stories are, in part, essays in a criticism by mimesis. The most difficult thing for an article to convey about the writing in *Tatlin!* is its subtle use of known voices and styles of prose. The first chapter of the title story captures, by an act of imaginary eavesdropping, the exact tone of someone present at an exhibition of Tatlin's constructivist works in the Moscow of 1932, the eggshell walk we know from memoirs of that period. The opening sentences of "The Aeroplanes at Brescia" are at once a description of Kafka, who is the central character of the story, and a condensed rendering of Kafka's vision and voice: "Kafka stood on the seawall at Riva under the early September sky. But for his high-button shoes and flaring coat, his easy stance had an athletic clarity. He walked with the limberness of a racing cyclist." It is Kafka not as he saw himself but done in his own style. And the story "1830," which is about Poe, has the tonality of nineteenth-century prose, though if you look for direct imitations of that rhetoric you won't find them. The book is, simply, superbly written, and I know of no one in our language who can equal its accomplishment.

In method the stories are comparative, analogical; they develop through parallels and oppositions, through contrasts built around the same motif—for instance, the motif of the flying machine, which Tatlin attempts to humanize in his glider or "air bicycle," which appears in the Kafka story as an awkward bit of flying junk, but reappears in "Robot" as the Messerschmidt, and in "The Dawn in Erewhon" finally as the craft that takes Neil Armstrong to the moon. It is a historical-critical method, aware of evolutions, affinities, echoes, recurrences; a method that will join together the German planes flying reconnaissance over southern France with the discovery of Aurignacian paintings at Lascaux.

But it is above all a fictional method. The stories are described in the

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book as "assemblages of history and necessary fiction." In a note attached to the original magazine publication of "Robot"[2] Davenport says, "My story is an *assemblage* of facts insofar as they can be known." But the stories function least as assemblages, more as essays in criticism, most as fictions. The story "Tatlin!" includes a number of drawings by the author, meticulously finished; heads of Lenin appear serially in the opening pages, heads of Stalin in the closing pages; in between there are drawings of Tatlin's constructivist works, which are assemblages of discrete materials mounted on panels. These drawings strike me as strange. They are portraits of art-works in which the medium of the portrait negates the medium of the art-work. If Ingres had made drawings of Monet's water-lily paintings, the effect would be similar, but here the negation is still more absolute because the art-works are assemblages. The stories are like these drawings. They are assemblages to the extent that they are composed of materials taken from various sources. But they have been reduced to the uniform consistency of fiction. If they had been allowed to stand as assemblages, the book would be very different.

The ruling spirit of *Tatlin!* is not constructivism, it is the spirit of reverie. And it seems to me that the origin of the stories must have been more in reverie than in thought: dreams of an educated mind, the sort of thing that comes into your head as you sit among the books and objects in your study (Dürer's St. Jerome) and invoke the name "Wittgenstein" or "Herakleitos," or think the words "Picasso" and "Cro-Magnon" together, or "glider" and "Daedalus." The words "Kafka" and "Brescia" bring together certain local sensations: de Chirico perspectives, a furtive Pinocchio, the image of a ruined castle (Brunnenburg in Merano, where Pound lived; there is a photo of it in Kenner's *Pound Era*), recollections of the peculiar force of Kafka's parables, in the midst of modern excitement an inexplicable sadness. And it is possible to imagine that Kafka might have rubbed elbows with Wittgenstein at the air show at Brescia without knowing who he was but as if sensing that he would in time become "Wittgenstein." The word "designer" also has certain overtones, at once archaic and modern, which can be used to characterize Tatlin as a primal artist. Such elusive material makes up the separate continuum of art-romance.

Reverie attaches to ideas as well. "The Dawn in Erewhon" is a tissue of ideas that are elegantly formed, savored for their resonance, made fragrant with strong coffee and the honey and tar of tobacco, and never really thought. They are ideas as beautiful objects, ideas as tokens of an ingenious mind; what counts is not the ideas themselves but the feeling of having them. In the story "Herakleitos" a young Arcadian named Knaps comes to learn from the master. Toward the end the narrator says, "Knaps had heard beautiful sentences since he came. *Character is fate. How can you hide from what never sets? Defend the law as you would the city wall.*" Etc. Beautiful sentences. It is impossible for us to approach the world of Herakleitos; what little of it appears in his fragments is, however, nothing

[2] THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. XXV, No. 3, Autumn 1972.

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like the simple dream Davenport records in this story. The thesis, expressed elsewhere in the book, that modern thought is a resurgence of Herakleitean thought, is embodied here in the person of a little professor on sabbatical in the Greek islands, a friendly and eccentric man with good taste in music and a collector's eye for antiques, who punctuates his talk with quotations from Herakleitos. He is not unlike the Abbé Breuil in "Robot," though Breuil is a more successful portrait because he was, in a way, what Davenport imagines Herakleitos to have been, part priest and part connoisseur.

Dreams of the wise man are an important part of *Tatlin!* These figures are represented as having wisdom, though what they think remains unthought in the stories. Fiction is a medium for reverie, for the romance of reality, for synthetic portraiture; it is not a medium for thought. But the preponderance of thematic ideas in these stories seems to call for thought. Ideas are not presented as traits of character; on the contrary, characters are chosen because they represent ideas. But the repetition of the same cluster of ideas throughout the book makes one feel, after a while, that the characters are trapped in them and limited by them, that they are tired of speaking these incantations that have frozen them into attitudes. The end of "Tatlin!" and the end of "The Dawn in Erewhon" have the same melancholy; it is like a sudden aging. Fiction encourages us to see the characters in *Tatlin!* as living human beings, but the author's hand pushes them toward abstraction and caricature. Yet the author is forbidden by the techniques of fiction to let his hand show.

"1830," perhaps the most perfect fiction in the book, is also in part a parable of fiction itself, one law of which is the disappearance of the author. The narrator of the story is Poe, though that name is never mentioned. But he is really Proteus. He appears in the story as Edgar A. Perry, discoursing on astronomy and the Greek war of independence with a Russian prince and his sister, in a language permeated with Greek architectural orders. It is discovered, however, that this strange American poet is registered at his hotel under another name, Henri de Rennet. When the sister demands to know who he really is, he becomes flustered, denies any mystery, and leaves. But on his way out he imagines saying to the prince, "I am André Marie de Chénier. I was guillotined thirty-six years ago, *le septième Thermidor, l'an 1*. I am a ghost." All of this is Poe's recollection, if not his dream. But in fact he is not Poe either, he is no-man, because the story itself is apocryphal.

No-man is of course the author of *Tatlin!* He has not quite disappeared. He portrays himself, and does not portray himself, in the final story which is half the length of the book, in the equivocal character-caricature of Adriaan van Hovendaal, a Dutch professor and writer, who is our contemporary. The story, which draws together the other five and at the same time reflects back on them, is itself polymorphous; it maintains the spell of fiction, yet is also a fantasia on the writing of fictions; its ideas, particularly its Utopian theme, are presented seriously in one place but travestied in another; its ideal man, both thinker and gymnast, rebirth of the archaic in

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the modern, is shown at the same time to be narcissistic, epicurean, vague, pretentious, and ill-at-ease. Why is it all so curiously two-sided? I think that is the right question to ask of the story, provided it is asked inquiringly. Reverie and critical intelligence mingle in various ways in *Tatlin!;* here they are in complex opposition. If the story were resolved either into consistent fiction or into satire, it would lose its peculiar rightness.

The puzzle of Adriaan van Hovendaal holds the materials of the story together. He is presented rather simply, as a light-hearted visual thinker, an orderly sensualist, a dreamer of worlds. Of all the pairs of opposites that are the forms of his reverie, one pair is missing, the one pair that most fundamentally shapes human existence: the opposition of necessity and will. Labor reveals the bond between necessity and will: men labor out of necessity, but it is against necessity that they set their will and articulate it. No one works in the stories in *Tatlin!,* and in that sense existence is unrecognizable in them. But the absence of work, and of any notion of work, is conspicuous in "The Dawn in Erewhon." Adriaan van Hovendaal is a man of leisure. He thinks analogically, brilliantly, easily; he has an appetite for thinking. But his thought meets no opposition, and therefore it has no conception of necessity and is devoid of will. In this contradictory condition there is a real and disturbing truth, a truth of character that is also a truth of history. It seems almost to have taken the story by surprise.

Pathless on all paths: something of this realization comes over Adriaan van Hovendaal in the next to last chapter of the story, though its tragic poetry is colored by epicurean melancholy and a stoic resolution. His pathlessness is the impasse of fiction, the inner condition of our time, and if it has been recognized critically before, it has rarely been given such familiar likeness. It is a portrait relieved of gravity but not of seriousness, at once a self-confession and a self-satire, a study in the problematics of the modern neo-pagan, city-dwelling intellect.

Much of Adriaan van Hovendaal's thought is involved with an Orphic myth-making. He toys with myths as if searching for some motive in his floating life. But the game is dangerous. Myths and their demonic power are the model for all fiction. Kafka understood this, and he understood that the true storyteller is a myth-breaker. To say that he foresaw the totalitarian state in *The Trial* is not enough. He put a revealing sentence into the mouth of the ape in "Report to an Academy:" "I imitated people because I needed a way out, and for no other reason." Since the story is not really about a talking ape, it is also not a question of a real cage.

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WILLIAM H. PRITCHARD

Novel Sex and Violence

> Sexual intercourse began
> In nineteen sixty-three
> (Which was rather late for me)—
> Between the end of the *Chatterley* ban
> And the Beatles' first LP.

WELL MAYBE NOT EXACTLY, but I identify with Philip Larkin's sentiment, so am fortunate to have all these new novels to read. Few of them are distinguished by old-fashioned, complex, Henry Jamesian equivocation.[1] James is out, along with T. Stearns Eliot; the younger set is dying to read really sincere, popular lit, and would do it joyously if there weren't professors still dogged by irony and outmoded highbrow tastes. This information comes of course from the horse's mouth, Leslie (let's-all-take-off-our-neckties) Fiedler. Interviewed recently by William S. Buckley, whose necktie remained strikingly calm throughout the revelation, Fiedler mentioned that James's inadequacy to play in the big leagues was shown by the lousy names he gave his characters: "Hyacinth Robinson," Fiedler jeered, claiming, perhaps as a mark of virtue, not to remember the book in which poor Hyacinth lives. I wish at that point Buckley had presented him with Earl Thompson's 568-biggie of a naturalistic nuvvle in which it all hangs out without repressive gestures or high art, and with a he-man hero to boot named, admirably, Jack Anderson. Stunning moments of poetry crop up in this saga of life in and out of the U.S. Navy, 1946-51: "His big bare white ass shown pinkly above the girl's spread knees"; or "In his dreams he had beat her big freckled ass with the flat of his samurai sword until she blubbered and begged." Such imagery can be traced through the book. Dedicated "To Mai Zetterling, whose existence is an inspiration and whose personal alchemy so helped keep me alive in a mean time," *Tattoo* is an Alternate Book of the Month Club suggestion. Searingly Honest.

Nothing highbrow about Frederick Shroyer and Marlene Shyer neither. Shroyer has authored twelve books (including two gothic novels), won numerous awards, lives with wife and daughter in Monterey Park, professes English at Cal. State U. in Los Angeles and does it up like this:

> And then in love and fury, and filled with a lust that was half combat, she came to him, winced as his body first moved away from her em-

[1] TATTOO, by *Earl Thompson*. G. P. Putnam's. $8.95. THERE NONE EMBRACE, by *Frederick Shroyer*. Nash. $5.95. LOCAL TALENT, by *Marlene Shyer*. Bobbs-Merrill. $6.95. GATHERING FORCE, by *Leslie Newman*. Simon & Schuster. $7.95.

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> brace, and exulted as his lips at last responded to the soft pressures of hers. Breathlessly, she fell with him upon the bed. Her hands writhed with a frantic will of their own over his body. . . .

This is Aubrey's wife, but his mother is pretty terrific too and you'll want to participate in the struggle between them for the young fellow's soul and body. And since words can do anything, writhe with a frantic will of their own, why not play it for laughs, name your lover Timbermann and have him sink (if you are Marlene Shyer's heroine) to his knees in front of you:

> We had a paralyzed face-to-face moment there, then his arms flew up like night wings and gripped me tight around the back—very tender angry, angry-tender. . . .
>
> I tasted all of summer: I smelled the trees and the grass and green leaves and Rolaids on his breath while my heart was going like an eggbeater. . . .

Marlene's "innumerable stories" have been published in *Good Housekeeping, Redbook* and *McCall's,* but this is her first novel. Although Shroyer and Shyer are not yet household names, nobody would wish them anything but the best of luck.

Never trust a reviewer who quotes Hot Passages, then says he can't abide them, but after this exposure in-depth (as they say at the university) I am prepared to assert that most writing about Sex is worse than the thing itself, or at least a good deal more drearily wordy and self-congratulatory. Leslie Newman, married as the jacket says proudly to David, "author of *Bonnie and Clyde* and others," is only 34 years old but has pulled out all the stops in her first novel to the extent that *on the last two pages,* after a couple-swap which eventually fizzles, the I-narrator, Ms. Jane Eyre of 1974, says goodbye (I think) to old Leonard, her husband who suggested the whole gross idea: "I grabbed his shirt, pulling it open, the buttons flying. . . . My nails leaving white, then faintly pink trails. And then lightly, lightly, over his nipples. 'Your mouth,' he said thickly." Leslie Newman is already at work on her second novel.

Enough of junk, but in case you think this reviewer has moral objections to couple-swap novels, perish the thought and sit down for a quick read through *The 158-Pound Marriage* by a writer hitherto unknown to me.[2] John Irving's book uses as epigraph some words from Ford's *The Good Soldier,* and adheres to that novel's design by having everything told through a slightly bewildered, confidential "I" who relates the sexual history of two couples making a stab at Sharing, i.e. exchanging beds and having good suppers together as well. Unlike Ford's story, this one isn't the saddest, though it doesn't end cozily. John Irving is both a humorist and very good at creating a human voice; much of the charm of this book is the way the most outlandish (immoral?) goings-on are converted into the thoughtful,

[2] THE 158-POUND MARRIAGE, by *John Irving.* Random House. $5.95.

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unshowy accents of a storyteller you can't but like—who uses words well. There are occasional specialities: the four experimenters spend a weekend at mother's house on the Cape and there are exploits enacted in places like (as they have been christened by one of the participants) The Great Green Wrenching Orgasm Room, or the Come If You Can Room. I thought this was inventive and good fun. There are also highjinks involving the cooking and eating of a marvelous paella, during which activity other highpowered stuff is brought off. Not much moral enlightenment in all of this, if any is demanded; Irving seems to be doing, admittedly with sensational material but cooled through rumination and wry observation, what the better books from this quarter are engaged in: telling mere stories which resist the ascription to them of timeless wisdom.

One example of this writer's command of words and things, here exercised on a non-sexual artifact, eventually to be converted to sexual use, the University Cage where Severin Winter (one of the foursome) does his wrestling coaching:

> The cage was an ominous humped dome of brick; it looked like a crematorium for athletes. It was laced with ivy as thick as a girl's wrist; the roof was a beehive of glass, skylight windows so old and dull that they'd lost their glint. A huge circular space with a hard-packed mud and cinder floor, it was used primarily for indoor track and field events; it smelled like a greenhouse, except that plants don't sweat. ("Everything sweats," said Winter.) To prevent discuses from breaking the skylights during track meets, they'd drop nets all over the inside of the dome, like a see-through shroud. Indoor tennis was played there, too.

The book as a whole shows comparable wit.

Alan Lelchuk can also be praised as a good storyteller: *Miriam at Thirty-four* is hard not to keep reading with attention, though of a grisly and finally self-demeaning sort.[3] "A Hardy tale in modern-day Cambridge" (Mass.) claims the jacket and invites us to follow the Contemporary Woman, released finally from a "long, constricting marriage" (really, all you need do these days is just say "marriage" and you've said it bad enough) into self-discovery. The self expands through sex, the "babe in the repression-woods" (still quoting the jacket) becomes a woman, and eventually—as with Hardy's Tess—receives her comeuppance in a disastrous and shocking finale. Lelchuk's novel hasn't made a splash on the book-front, but certainly could be the perfect object for ideological squabble: the Liberated Woman is likely to see this as one male's cheap-shot revenge on her sex—reducing "liberation" to sexual freedom, then doing in the freewheeling practitioner. On the other hand, the book fits perfectly into the hands of anyone sick to death of the cant of Finding Oneself, even at the Radcliffe Institute for Women; or one muses that

[3] MIRIAM AT THIRTY-FOUR, by *Alan Lelchuk*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. $7.95.

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anybody who runs around Cambridge taking that many pictures (Miriam is a serious photographer) deserves what happens to her.

Yet the real problem is not ideology but style, and here perhaps opposed temperaments could find common meeting-place. Even if Lelchuk is eventually out to punish his heroine, he early on establishes full complicity with her through his style, as here in the lovemaking which opens the book:

> . . . no longer awkward Brown or body-ashamed Scheinman but a deep driven woman, a Miriam of dominion now, making her pelvis into some sort of crazy angry ring holding fast this sharp piston, and with the smart control she had learned (from him in part) taught him back, paid him back, taught him about *basking*. . . . She closed the eye then; she labored and pleasured and used that pelvis hard and round and teasing true . . .

It's that last phrase which brings the sneer to my lips: a seemingly hard-working writer loving up his own phrases, sentimental-poetic as they may be ("teasing true" indeed!). Clearly Lelchuk thinks that both he and his heroine are admirable at this point, as they are later on when they see through the Radcliffe Institute:

> Again, the institute did have its share of duds in one way or another, women afflicted with self-importance, parochialism, dullness. Selfish neurotic types posing as sensitive poets and tough painters. (And when you added a strain of women's lib formulas to some, the virus was disconcerting. Like Carol L., given a grant to study who was sexist in literature and who was not; Jarna D., there to write "militant women's poetry"; or pixie-faced Mary de J., narrating her "retraining" of her academic husband, as if getting him to vacuum was the latest obstacle in her boot camp. Why, Miriam wondered, did Red Guard views of reality have to dilute what may have been authentic problems?)

Lelchuk can't answer that question either, and no writer who pats his heroine on the back to such an extent can later pretend to judge or educate her, or to imagine a self-destruction which wipes out all the intelligent cleverness of a perception like the above.

As with Lelchuk's previous *American Mischief*, the present novel is superb in its presentation of Greater Boston, particularly the "accepted insanities" of Cambridge. But onto this realistic, scenic base is grafted Tall Story Superstructure; Kovell in the earlier book had six lovers, and Miriam here has three, alternating—a sort of Ginger Rogers *Tom, Dick and Harry* movie brought up to date thirty-five years later. Or (as with the earlier shooting of Norman Mailer), Lelchuk has his photographer here "shoot" Satch Sanders and Paul Silas (she takes in a Celtics practice session) and introduces us to Tom Heinsohn, "a tough Irish teamster, good-looking," who says "You sure she's not working for Shue or Holtzman?"

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Lots of fun, but you can't move from this atmosphere to parables of self-destruction of self-fulfillment. At least I couldn't.

The women are a shade less sensational about their heroines' adventures as unmarried or estranged females looking to find themselves amidst contemporary turmoils.[4] Gail Godwin has received lots of praise from lots of names for her first two novels, but the latest one (and how fast they come!) is a solemn 400-page bore, for all its occasional attempts at self-irony. It's hard to care much about Jane Clifford, Eng lit prof who fifteen years ago would have been turning out articles on Spenser or Milton for PMLA and is today respectably "into" George Eliot and George Gissing, while having a less-than-torrid affair with a married prof who is into Ruskin. As the title suggests, the Gissing-gimmick is worked all too steadily through the book, since our heroine tends to carry around the master's novel wherever she goes, which gets her into conversations like this with her brilliant friend Sonia ("Chilled white wine would be lovely . . . Only, I have to save some of my wits for later, because I want to grade all my papers tonight") who riffles through *The Odd Women:*

> "Any good? You're using it for the spring course, aren't you."
>
> "It's a tough little book. Inelegant, maybe, but I like it. It will work well in the course. What I like about Gissing is that he lets his characters think. They come to horrible ends, most of them, but they keep track of themselves so beautifully along the way. And he writes women well. He doesn't keep the sexual-ironic distance of many male writers when writing about female characters."
>
> "Or female writers writing about male characters," added Sonia. "We must be fair, mustn't we?" Ellen Glasgow makes her men seem such fools. Now there's a challenge. *Barren Ground*. . . . It's the book which tests the mettle of the sincerest militant."

No doubt, but if there are people who talk like this in life they should avoid getting themselves into novels. Committed to writing women well, Gail Godwin could use lots more sexual-ironic distance in testing the mettle of her sincerest heroine.

Somebody was due to come along and write a most timely novel about the marital split that comes about when a man, better yet an academic, sins with his half-as-old female student and moves out of the old homestead. Alison Lurie combines this phenomenon, contemporary parent-children awfulness and post-late-sixties malaise, with enough cleverness to make it not surprising that *The War Between the Tates* is a modest best-seller. It is smoothly-engineered, highly readable, and contains a respectable amount of sensitive perception about what it is like

[4] THE ODD WOMAN, by *Gail Godwin,* Knopf. $8.95. THE WAR BETWEEN THE TATES, by *Alison Lurie.* Random House. $6.95. THE SHADOW KNOWS, by *Diane Johnson.* Knopf. $6.95.

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suddenly to be a single woman again—the woman gets invited out to parties because she must need to see people, while the man gets a dinner because naturally he can't cook. The novel has been extensively reviewed here and in England, Miss Lurie's virtues and faults adequately assessed, and I would only say here what may sound churlish and overrefined—that it is dangerous to write about your heroine in the present tense: "Erica does not smile. It is bad enough that her best friend should have been raped once by a stupid, coarse, red-faced veterinarian. That she should passively let it happen a second time worries Erica even more. She decides to speak out." A typical moment, with Alison Lurie so confessedly pulling the strings (now I'm going to have my character do *this*) that it is difficult to look past her manipulative gestures, accomplished as always they are, and believe there's somebody really out there in trouble. So even if, as James Merrill has been quoted as saying and Miss Lurie not denied, she is the wisest woman in America, it's possible that relaxing the witty grip and constant hovering over scene and character might be a further wisdom for this novelist, might make possible the imagining of children who weren't *just* monsters, a man who is not wholly a creature of vanity and lust, a young girl who wasn't completely defined by her flower-child vocabulary. Easy enough advice to give, from somebody who can't write clever and manipulative novels, but so be it.

Diane Johnson isn't as clever as Alison Lurie and doesn't always aim to have the reader in the palm of her hand. *The Shadow Knows* has a lot of scare-thriller stuff that tries to whip the story along (who is trying to murder our heroine with her four children?) but it often pauses to be thoughtful and incisive about human folly, as in this passage about her heroine's lover, generalized into a type:

> The man at the end of his thirties, beginning of his forties, his professional success assured, having propitiated the ghosts of his forefathers and accommodated the hopes of his mother, looks around at the dismal wreck of his prosperous life, looks within, falls in love—is perhaps imprinted with love for the first woman who walks by after the scales have fallen—takes a mistress in whose arms his sexual powers have never been more astonishing, this belying the first gray hair at his temples, soars on wings. And then must engage with reality—his promises, other peoples's version of him, his own habits, mortgages, the disappointments of his children.

These sentences may perhaps serve to show how this writer, at her best—and she is not always at it—is both intelligent and interesting about life and believes that to be that way as a novelist you have to work a bit at writing sentences. Even though this passage has made up its mind about a moment in life and common responses to it, Diane Johnson doesn't preen herself, but makes it sound as if the thought really emerged from the mind of a character trying to sort things out. The book reads as if when she began it she had no idea of how to end it, and in fact the ending (and

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much of the lead-up material) seemed to me fairly gratuitous; but the texture of domestic life, and the general non-sexist intelligence revealed, is an augury that this novelist will produce more interesting work. She knows what things look like, how they feel, is resourceful in her drawings upon the language and can be both funny and discreet as regards the Sexual Relation. As in her earlier novel *Burning,* she sometimes strains for "story" effects more than is necessary for the reader who, like me, is content to have her write about women and men in and out of love.

The Abbess of Crewe,[5] Muriel Spark's spinoff on Watergate (though really she has been doing this sort of thing all along) features Sister Felicity, a bad actor who not only wants to be Abbess but is acting up with her Jesuit lover Thomas and threatens to reveal that the abbey is bugged. The other nuns draw up their wagons in a circle around the present Abbess and defend life as they have known it:

> "She was on the television again tonight?" says Mildred.
>
> "Yes, with her insufferable charisma. She said she forgives us all, every one, but still she considers as a matter of principle that there should be a police enquiry."
>
> "But she has no proof," says Walburga the Prioress.
>
> "Someone leaked the story to the evening papers," says the Abbess, "and they immediately got Felicity on the television."
>
> "Who could have leaked it?" says Walburga, her hands folded on her lap, immovable.
>
> "Her lax and leaky Jesuit, I dare say" . . . "That Thomas," says the Abbess, "who tumbles Felicity."

It could be rather fey but is so short and coolly detached that everything works out nicely. The pleasures are partly a matter of juxtaposing ill-fitting dictions, as when the Abbess, looking to enlist the help of some real *mensch* Jesuits (Fathers Baudouin and Maximilian) serves them cress sandwiches and shortbread, then expatiates on the world-food crisis: "Fathers, there are vast populations in the world which are dying or doomed to die through famine, under-nourishment and disease; people continue to make war, and will not stop, but rather prefer to send their young children into battle to be maimed or to die . . . and it is at such a moment as this, Fathers, that your brother-Jesuit Thomas has taken to screwing our Sister Felicity by night under the poplars. . . ." Turns out that, as you might have guessed, the poplars are bugged. Artfully placed within the little tale are relevant quotations from high-class characters like Marvell, Bishop King, Henry Vaughan and Ezra Pound—all in all an elegant and chaste performance, highly recommended especially for those, including myself, who have not always been faithful and devoted followers of Muriel Spark.

As for Gore Vidal[6] ("Mr. Veedle" as Lily Tomlin used to put it so well)

[5] THE ABBESS OF CREWE, by *Muriel Spark*. Viking $6.95.

[6] MYRON, by *Gore Vidal*. Random House. $6.95.

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it is a long but quite comprehensible trip from *The City and the Pillar* to *Myron,* and considering the limited fictional possibilities opened up by that earlier book I think nobody could regret the latter, nor lament that Vidal has settled for less than he was capable of. Even though it has already had much publicity, Vidal's brilliant prefatory note must be saluted; he will conform to the spirit of the Supreme Court's decision about pornography by eliminating all "dirty" words which could cause offence, therefore making the resulting work "clean": "In this novel I have replaced the missing bad words with some very good words indeed: the names of the justices who concurred in the Court's majority decision. Burger, Rehnquist, Powell, Whizzer White and Blackmun fill, as it were, the breach. . . ." And into the breach they bravely go, as Myra Breckinridge "trapped inside a Chinese caterer [Myron] in the San Fernando Valley, with, admittedly, a big restructured rehnquist between his legs but no powells," attempts to regain control not only of "her" body but to bring back Hollywood's Golden Age 1939-45, when Andy Hardy and Lewis B. Mayer reigned while our boys struck down Hitler and The Nips. Myra/Myron alternate chapters in this novel, whose main scene is the shooting of a 1948 movie bomb called *Siren of Babylon*, starring Maria Montez and Bruce Cabot. Eventually Myra becomes Maria Montez, as she is filming the picture, then in one marvelous moment (as Maria) runs into Judy Garland and tries to warn her off drugs so as not to be replaced by Betty Hutton in *Annie Get Your Gun* " 'Cut the clowning, Judy. Put yourself away. Dry out. Get off the pills. If you don't you'll be dead in twenty-one years.' " To which Judy, understandably, replies, "That's a hell of a long time off and besides. . . ." Or Myra has her vision of visions, William Eythe and Lon McCallister together *in the flesh,* in an open convertible:

> Like Carole Landis, Willian Eythe had no back to his head; each died young. He of a liver complaint; she a suicide. But Lon ("Bud") McCallister lives on, I am told, doing well with his many business enterprises in and around Malibu, and though one is happy for him today (1973), he is of course no longer the boy who broke your heart in *Stage Door Canteen,* playing Romeo to Katharine Cornell's gracious Juliet nor can he ever again go home, except on the Late Show, to Indiana.

Scudda Hoo! Scudda Hay! This 1940's Late Show is superbly conducted; Vidal is not merely "camp" because he is too knowing and funny and soaked in the 'forties to be exhausted by the category. But it's not glorious nostalgia either; only hopelessly corrupted types can appreciate the true beauty of that above paragraph. Like Carole Landis indeed!

Looking for something to be pleased about when confronted with current book prices (don't expect to find a novel under $6.95) one might splurge to the extent of writing a reprint house entitled, gloriously, Jubilee Books, Inc. New York, N.Y. 10001 and, ordering for a relatively modest sum, copies of two of

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Wyndham Lewis's most interesting novels, just reprinted by this firm.[7] *Tarr* has never before been reprinted in its 1918 form, complete with preface and the original Knopf plates; a book more heard about than read, now would be the time to remedy that situation. Even fuller gratitude should be directed towards whoever it was that finally masterminded *The Vulgar Streak,* published in 1941, into its first American appearance thirty-two years later. This novel about a counterfeiter, about the class struggle in its absurdity, about England on the brink of war, shows Lewis in his most approachable and ingratiating guise—thus its quite unknown status is all the more sad. Completed in America, a novel which he directed copies of to be sent to H. G. Wells and George Orwell, it is now finally—with a bit of effort on the curious reader's part—available beyond the confines of a few select libraries. With only eight more years until the Lewis centenary (will there be a party?) there is still time to read these novels that give us a new look at, among other things, sex and violence.

Evan Connell's *The Connoisseur* is remarkable for the way it inhabits totally different territory from that staked out by other novels.[8] No sex, no violence, that is; instead the patient tracing of a man who gets hooked, but on pre-Columbian artifacts. As the epigraph from Aquinas has it *Id quod visum placet;* Muhlbach's obsession, as the novel develops it, keeps looking as if it can be understood by Connell and the reader, but in fact by the end of the book there's no interesting way to talk about it, no lesson learned that I can see about human imagination and desire except that they make the world go round. The book is notable for the way it lives pretty completely within its technical Mayan vocabulary—so much lore that one almost begins to mouth the words and sentences independently of any reference they might have. Connell's recent poetic eloquence (*Points for a Compass Rose,* 1973), impressive and overbearing in its erudition, wearingly if justly calling to account recent public luminaries ("those deft brothers/McGeorge and William Bundy, whose ascent/flashed across bloody skies . . ."), has here been replaced by a toneless super-cool recitation of events in which even quotation marks, or other incitements toward emphasis and tone in the dialogue, are absent. It may be remembered then that at his best, in the two books about Mrs. and Mr. Bridge (and shouldn't they be prime material for your latest university course in man-woman follies?) Connell was similarly detached, an icy presenter to the point of seeming callousness. But in fact those books were full of life, richly observed and achingly true to what one knows it was like in Kansas City, 1935 in a nice, well-brought-up household. One admires the new novel but allows the wish that this author would have one more go at family life forty years later in which Mrs. Bridge-remarks ("I look just like Tobacco Road") could be updated.

[7] TARR, by *Wyndham Lewis.* Jubilee Press. $12.50. THE VULGAR STREAK, by *Wyndham Lewis.* Jubilee Press. $10.00.

[8] THE CONNOISSEUR, by *Evan S. Connell Jr.* Knopf. $6.95.

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Two collections of short stories have been under-noticed:[9] Henry Bromell's won the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship Award, no easy one to ignore since past winners include Penn Warren, Elizabeth Bishop, Roth, Clancy Sigal, Robert Stone and Willie Morris. These stories, mostly published in *The New Yorker,* seemed when I read a couple of them there to be too quickly classifiable as made-to-order for the magazine; too quietly knowing about how well-bred stories ought to be written. But collected and read together they changed my mind. Bromell, writing about a family seen through the eyes of its members—particularly one son—doesn't have any fancy stunts or big ideas to get rolling; the stories are no better than they feel in the moment-to-moment development through conversation and narrator-reflection, of which the following may serve to set the tone of these stories as a college student in a small New England town surveys the land in "Jewels and Binoculars":

> Last fall, he had stood on the bank of that river, along with forty-seven other sophomore geology students and stared at several preserved dinosaur tracks and thought that his consciousness should have included memories of a father dinosaur leading his family away from the approaching glacier and into the desert to die. But his mind could rarely move beyond the short history of the town: the Indians, the pioneers, the long winters, the college, the new highway stretching as far as the river and ringed with Howard Johnsons and supermarkets. Even the Indians sometimes seemed too mystical to be real.

Bromell is twenty-six but doesn't have a message from youth to deliver, nor a bee in his bonnet of any sort I have been able to detect. He is willing to hang around his characters and see if anything will transpire, which means that a reader should have an ear for dead air and less than striking exchanges. It is surely post-post-Hemingway, but done with real modesty and politeness and a tough assurance that suggest Bromell may be no more than a good writer. At any rate these stories are worth looking up.

As are Alice Munro's, a Canadian from another generation, whose métier seems truly to be the short story even though she recently published a novel *(Lives of Girls and Women).* Her materials are provincial, sometimes regional, domestic, marital, always particular, humorous, vividly in touch with ordinary life—strange as it is. She brings to my mind two American masters of this mode—Flannery O'Connor and Eudora Welty—though she is less a creator of grotesques (Western Canada can't quite match up to the South?) than either. She is usually detached, not unsympathetic to her characters but surely not to be identified with them either; it is therefore interesting that in one story called "Tell Me Yes or No" a woman muses about her early married life in a voice close to the novelist's most personal one and in terms that at least some readers should find familiar:

[9] THE SLIGHTEST DISTANCE by *Henry Bromell.* Houghton-Mifflin. $6.95. SOMETHING I'VE BEEN MEANING TO TELL YOU, by *Alice Munro.* McGraw-Hill. $6.95.

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> We lived then in a community called The Huts, on the edge of the campus. They were in fact old army huts, used as married students' quarters. I was reading *The Magic Mountain,* all one winter. I would fall asleep with it across my stomach. Sometimes I would read aloud to Douglas, when he was too tired to work any more. When I finished *The Magic Mountain* I meant to get us through *Remembrance of Things Past.* We stumbled to bed with our arms around each other, united in our longing for sleep. But occasionally I would have to get out of bed, later, and go into the bathroom to put in my diaphragm. If I looked out the top half of the bathroom window, through the gap in the plastic curtains, I could see lights on in some of the other bathroom windows in the colony, and I would imagine other wives risen in the night on a similar errand. Creatures of daily use, inseparable from infants, stoves, and tubs, turned now to our nightly use, with its connotations—rapidly fading—of sin and splendor. I remembered from far back—from four or five years back actually, that seemed a long time to me—how sex had seemed apocalyptic (we read Lawrence, many of us virgins at twenty). Now it had shrunk to this brisk, unvarying, satisfactory, localized exchange, contained appropriately enough in these domestic quarters. I felt nothing so definite as dissatisfaction. I simply registered the change, as I would register the diminished glamour of Christmas.

Such writing comes with the grateful shock of fresh recognition and sanity: fiction is not a joke, the imagination is not a put-on, art exists to convey the rhythms and diminished glamours of felt life. Alice Munro's stories are not always fully organized, inevitably moving to conclusion; but she is a truly exploratory, a human and humanely endowed writer—somebody very simply one would like to meet as well as to read.

In conclusion, the two best fictions I've read lately are John Fowles's tales and Robert Stone's novel.[10] Trying to imagine what principle of association could possibly bind two such different talents together, I decided that, of all the writers of this quarter they were the coolest—using the term advisedly and in not just its hip sense—and the best storytellers. Being a cool writer doesn't of course mean that you deny or suppress passionate conflicts in your characters. The longest and most distinguished story in Fowles's collection—"The Ebony Tower"—is about an artist-art critic named David Williams on assignment to do the introduction to a volume about an Augustus John-type incorrigible old artist who lives in the South of France. The old man, a great painter, turns out to be in touch with nature, food, drink and other sensual pleasures including those provided by two young admirers, girls nicknamed winningly The Mouse and The Freak; and David, on his own, wife and kids back in South London, is touched and charmed by it all. Eventually as it comes time to leave he finds that neither he nor Diana (The Mouse) wants him to. Here is how

[10] THE EBONY TOWER, by *John Fowles.* Little-Brown. $8.95. DOG SOLDIERS, by *Robert Stone.* Houghton-Mifflin. $8.95.

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Fowles renders the moment of decision as sexual temptation presents itself on their final evening:

> And he thought of Beth, probably in bed by now in Blackheath, in another world, asleep; of his absolute certainty that there could not be another man beside her. His real fear was of losing that certainty. Childish: if he was unfaithful, then she would be. No logic. They didn't deny themselves the sole enjoyment of any other pleasure: a good meal, buying clothes, a visit to an exhibition. They were not even against sexual liberation in other people, in some of their friends; if they were against anything, it was having a general opinion on such matters, judging them morally. Fidelity was a matter of taste and theirs happened simply to conform to it; like certain habits over eating or shared views on certain fabrics. What one happened to like and live on and with. So why make an exception of this? Why deny experience, his artistic soul's sake, why ignore the burden of the old man's entire life? Take what you can. And so little: a warmth, a clinging, a brief entry into another body. One small releasing act. And the terror of it, the enormity of destroying what one had so carefully built.

They embrace passionately, but he cannot go on. "All that nonsense about chastity," as he puts it, turns out to be troublingly real. It is only after pulling back that he changes his mind. Too late: the legendary sword between them will not be removed.

He leaves in the morning, drives to Orly Airport, meets his wife in a chillingly rendered scene—"a new coat, surprise for him, a little flounce and jiggle to show it off. Gay Paree. Free Woman. Look, no children"—and he surrenders: to conventional expression, to words, to abstraction. It has been suggested that the hero stands condemned by the story, is shown up by the artist and his minions for the "timid, entangled, empty and abashed" figure Yeats said (in "Ego Dominus Tuus") that "critics" were. Maybe so, yet like Fowles's other heroes in these stories (a bookish writer terrorized by a burglar, a police sergeant on an impossible case) his consciousness is presented with such fullness, elegance, good manners and good sense, that he easily becomes more interesting than the figures around him. So that although he doesn't exactly win, he doesn't exactly lose either. Such indeterminacy leaves us not having to be for or against Life, but rather charmed and teased by Story which, when it is over, is over. One could go on at length to praise Fowles's mastery and rich use of the Fine Arts, the topography and sociology of London and the country; I say only that he is fast becoming the most satisfying younger novelist, along with Margaret Drabble, in England.

Reviewing *In Our Time,* D. H. Lawrence had this to say: "Mr. Hemingway does it extremely well. Nothing matters. Everything happens. One wants to keep oneself loose. Avoid one thing only: getting connected up. Don't get connected up. . . . Just get away for the sake of getting away." Lawrence found Hemingway "really good, because he's perfectly

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straight about it. . . . He doesn't even *want* to love anybody." Robert Stone's second novel is also really good, reminded me frequently of Hemingway (the epigraph from *Heart of Darkness* extends the line further back) and has thus far met with universal praise. Good as the book is, it may be that its subject matter—Vietnam and drugs, the Great Confusion and various momentary stays against confusion—is partly responsible for the acclaim. That there is a "connection" between the phenomena is undeniable, and succinctly put in an early meditation by John Converse, American journalist in Vietnam who decides to make a pile by shipping some heroin back home. Converse's last "moral objection" to anything, he remembers, was in response to an event called "The Great Elephant Zap" when herds of elephants were slaughtered from the air so as to deprive The Enemy of their use: "And as for dope, Converse thought, and addicts—if the world is going to contain elephants pursued by flying men, people are just naturally going to want to get high." Thus events are set in motion.

The war-drugs connection is established not through analysis and profound meditation by Stone or his characters (of which Converse, his wife Marge—on the "habit" herself, and a murderous pal named Ray Hicks are featured) but through story: from Vietnam to S.F. to Mexico and the end of things. This story is as elaborately twisty, as challenging to try and follow along without leaving something out, as a Raymond Chandler thriller, say *The Big Sleep;* the dialogue is ever-present, arresting and often very funny indeed—Lenny Bruce funny, that is. Here are Marge and Rowena, locked inside the ladies' room of the porno film house where they work, contemplating the patrons:

> "An awful lot of them are Chinese," she said to Marge. "You notice that?"
>
> The ethnic reference sounded a ghostly alarm from some dark place in the ruins of Marge's progressive conditioning.
>
> "Sure," she said. "Chinese are just as horny as anybody else."
>
> Rowena was thoughtful as she handed Marge the joint.
>
> "I think the Chinese are into a different thing. I think they dig the beauty of the bodies in a kind of aesthetic way."
>
> "I think they're jerking off."
>
> "They could do both," Rowena insisted. "I mean why should beauty be platonic? That's a western hang-up. They don't have the Judeo-Christian thing. You know?"

No friendly author-narrator, winking at the reader, stands behind these assorted losers, these junkies, creeps and U.S. riff-raff circa 1970. Stone is really no more detached from Converse, or Marge, or even Hicks, than Hemingway was from Krebs in the remarkable story "Soldier's Home" which D. H. Lawrence singled out for special mention in his review. As a result of his war nausea Krebs tries, unsuccessfully, to keep his life from being complicated; there is a moment when John Converse moves beyond

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complication into somewhere else. In the midst of a fragmentation bombing by the South Vietnamese Air Force (our allies) Converse suddenly glimpses himself as, in memorable words, "a funny little fucker." He realizes that "the ordinary physical world through which one shuffled heedless and half-assed toward nonentity was capable of composing itself, at any time and without notice, into a massive instrument of agonizing death." Flat on his face on the earth, he is granted what I take to be the novelist's intuition also, that "Existence was a trap; the testy patience of things as they are might be exhausted at any moment." After that, moral objections to just about anything, including heroin, can be overcome.

Stone sees all his characters as funny little fuckers—dog soldiers who soldier on but just may be inclined, things being what they are, to speed up the trip towards death. As with the earlier *Hall of Mirrors,* it is a claustrophobic world; barely a moment of impulse allowed in the direction of a better life; no figure from his ill-assorted gallery likely to take time out to read, oh, say Wordsworth or Dickens, or make up a large corned beef sandwich on rye and watch the late show. Everybody is tainted, even the old people round the television in a cheap hotel where Converse's mother lives have "reptile faces." If it weren't for the razor's edge of comic brilliance, the rich lore about other modes of behavior (I speak as an East Coast Straight), the flick and spring of exchange—hardly conversation—this would be a dreary and deathly book. But no, the novel is the book of life said the dying Lawrence as through gritted teeth he saluted Hemingway and Huxley and would have *The Day of the Locust.* Reading Robert Stone's book you know more about how life was never worse than in 1974 and how art is still art, doing ruthlessly and strangely what it does.

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